

Due to a technical issue the selection of Chuck Kleinhans writings could not be included in the PDF of Jump Cut 59. They are presented here. You can also read them at the online version of Jump Cut.

## Avant gardes, individuals, institutions

Several recent threads, which connect up with previous threads, address issues of the institutionalization of the avant garde. Here are some further thoughts--trying to synthesize.

**ESTABLISHMENT VS. UPSTART.** There's almost always some people who have an instant reaction to attack any ongoing institutions in experimental film/video. Part of this is due to the fact that experimental media almost always posits itself as vanguard in relation to the mainstream of art and society. Even the avant garde's institutions (eg, Anthology Film Archives, Canyon Cinema Coop, Jerome Foundation, various festivals, Millennium Film Journal, etc....maybe even Frameworks?) come under attack from time to time from different sectors of the community for specific sins of commission or omission. More mainstream institutions when they interface with the avant garde also come in for criticism (NEA, Rockefeller, NYSCA, PBS, AFI, etc.).

Some people articulate their criticism from what seems to be a developed anarchist politics. Others seem to just be expressing a sour grapes attitude based on their own experiences. Some of the former discussion in Frameworks has recommended a "just do it" kind of pragmatic enthusiasm for putting on an event, a festival, etc. That's an important part of the endless renewal of the avant garde, and an important way newcomers and ornery oldtimers get to shape the field. But there's also a strength in the stability and continuity of established institutions, which allow for the accumulation of resources--financial and experiential. The accumulated knowledge gained from history is a resource just as surely as the energy of new projects. Jack Smith carried on a decades long denunciation of Jonas Mekas, yet Anthology is certainly part of Mekas's legacy, and one which helps stabilize and preserve the work of Smith and other earlier filmmakers.

**THE PRIVILEGED ROLE OF THE ARTIST.** It is an often unexamined commonplace that the individual filmmaker is the origin, touchstone, and supreme arbiter for avant garde media. But a whole range of institutional structures help build and maintain the experimental media world: technologies of hardware and software, financing, equipment training and access, exhibition, distribution, criticism, education, archiving and preserving, curating, and scholarship. Some makers may assume they stand alone and can do it all themselves, and in many ways perhaps they can. But to do all of one's own exhibition and distribution, if one wants a larger audience than friends and family in one's living space, takes time, talents, and resources. And those detract from what's available for making more work.

# Experimental Film and Video: Concepts for Analysis

The films and videos we'll be looking at vary significantly from the usual dramatic narrative and documentary modes. Here are some concepts that can help you experience and analyze them.

Theme, rather than story, is often the uniting structural factor. "Theme" can be a recurring visual motif or can reside in the conceptual content of related images. MOTHLIGHT (Brakhage) has a beginning, middle, and end, but no narrative. Similarly with FOGLINE (Gottheim)

When there is a story, it is often told with an interior or psychological logic rather than a "realistic" plot (Deren's MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON, Bunuel and Dali's ANDALUSIAN DOG).

The link between images is usually associational rather than descriptive or discursive. (Conner's REPORT, Brakhage's WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING) The logic of image relationships is often based on content rather than chronology--that is, the logic of dream and poetry.

Little attempt is made to preserve the illusion of real time or real space. The expressive rearrangement of actual space and time is the norm. (Snow's WAVELENGTH, Gehr's SERENE VELOCITY) Or, real time and space can be used to break from the conventions of Hollywood or "realist" presentation. (Warhol's BLOW JOB) Often the experimental film generates a new time-space context of its own.

Frequently, technical or abstract elements of the medium such as camera movement, zooming, focus, cutting rhythm, direction of object movement, rate of object movement, color, shape, texture, superimposition are exploited as primary compositional elements, with the image content, or "meaning," being of secondary importance. This is the reverse of narrative film practice. (Lawder's RUNAWAY)

For example, normally we take it for granted that the horizontal rectangle is the proper way to see film. Musician/visual artist Brian Eno disrupted this expectation by making some video works that were intended to be seen with the monitor in the vertical (portrait) position rather than the horizontal (landscape) position.

Similarly, most of the time viewers accept that the edge of the frame is there, but not important as an element. Off screen space is sometimes used to create meaning in conventional films and tapes, but usually for surprise (in horror films, the menace is just off the screen's edge) or for a mild comedy (the TV monitor can

be thought of as a box like a little puppet theatre (or it could be until flat panel became the norm, which then offers its own possibilities: panel as window, or mirror, etc.) The Muppets are almost always presented just like a little hand puppet theatre.

The relation between sound and image tends to be based more often on analogy or contrast or contradiction than on reality. (Anger's SCORPIO RISING) Lipton, DOGGIE DINER AND THE RETURN OF DOGGY DINER

The statement made or the vision presented is most often the personal one of an individual artist working directly in the medium, rather than supervising a group of hired technicians. Often the "voice" used is the personal one we find in lyric poetry: we sense the maker is speaking directly to us rather than through a "third person" or dramatic narration (Brakhage's WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING, Schneeman's FUSES, PULL MY DAISY)

Appreciation and understanding of the experimental film requires a different method of "reading." A mind set in the viewer akin to the one adopted in reading poetry or listening to music is usually most appropriate.

Often the maker seeks to change viewer consciousness or to operate on a different level of conscious/unconscious activity than is normal. Everyone has access to a range of different states of consciousness, experimental film often seeks access to one or several of those states.

While many experimental works clearly avoid the goal of "entertainment" this does not mean that they do not give pleasure. Often the pleasure is defined in a different way, however. Sometimes unpleasure is used as a deliberate element to affect the viewer (T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G).

The artist is often trying to change viewer consciousness by breaking both formal expectations and content expectations. Taboo breaking content is frequently used to shock or surprise or provoke laughter. This can lead to new thought and new (aesthetic) experience.

Often the social environment depicted is one deliberately set to run against the expectations of "normal" middle class manners and values. (SCORPIO RISING, FUSES, PULL MY DAISY)

Sometimes the films are deliberately puzzling: sometimes there is a solution to the puzzle, but often there is not. On first viewing, it can be a mistake to try to "put it all together" right away because the duration of puzzlement may be something being used in a creative way. Similarly, trying to find exact meanings for symbols (as in Maya Deren's work) may limit your appreciation. The power of such

symbols is often that they mean several things, or mean different things at different moments in the work.

With the above in mind, it will often be useful to ask yourself questions such as:

What is the main feeling or image that the film leaves in your mind? What is the overall mood of the film? How is that achieved? What meanings does it suggest?

What are the key images or symbols recurring in the film? Do they have a common element? Is there a thread connecting the associations set up in your mind?

On the technical/abstract level, what are the main recurrent motifs? How are they organized?

Many of the works we'll be looking at in the course are using form or style to change or shape or disrupt the content.

What's done with time? Is there an impression of chronological development? Is time broken up and rearranged? What effect does the use of time have on the overall image presented by the film?

What's done with space? Is space coherent in the film? Is it rearranged? What effect does the use of space have on the overall effect of the film?

What is done with the sound track (if there is one)? How are voice, sound, and music used in relation to each other and in relation to the image track?

What motivates or directs the changes from shot to shot, sequence to sequence? What patterns emerge in viewing?

Does the film have a structure? What defines this?

How does the film develop over time?

How does the film "educate" you to understand its aesthetics?

What are the pleasures in watching the film?

← Artworld

- ! Notes from various sources, esp. Stallybrass, Art Incorporated
- !
- ! Thesis one
  - The current art world system, especially in the west and cosmopolitan areas, is a subset of global neoliberalism
  - Even though it often appears to be in conflict with or opposed to or differentiated from the dominant order of things.
  - INSERT DEFINITION HERE OF NEOLIBERALISM
    - Appears to be in contrast to instrumental, administrative logic of the dominant order
    - Appears to be vs. bureaucratic life
    - Appears to be vs. commercialized mass culture
- ! Thesis two
  - The artworld economy
    - Seems to be based on unique or rare items
    - The work of mechanically reproduced art is constrained by artists and dealers
      - Limited editions
      - Numbered series of reproductions
      - Economic system of these arts is based in
        - ! Artist reputation (fame, celebrity, critical esteem, etc.)
    - Therefore, artists tend to escape from the most obvious marketing determinations of the commercial field
      - They appear to make from free will, rather than audience expectations; they can break with conventions, rules, taboos
      - 
      - it appears to be determined by various gatekeepers such as collectors, dealers, critics, curators, etc.
- ! Thesis three
  - The profession of artist is appealing
    - Seems to offer labor free of specialization

- Given to self-will (under the terms of creative expression, making from the heart and/or soul, etc.)
- For the art audience it seems that things are also “free” and “open”
  - Separate from the instrumental world of work and daily routine and economics
- The economy of global capital is not self evident to those at the core
  - E.g. “cultural imperialism” model is more evident to the importing country than to the exporting country
  - It is harder to pin down in a postcolonial era when taste is not informed through trade regulation, formal education, etc.
- There is an international art market which is cosmopolitan, but clearly dominated by a system of financial power exactly parallel to global financial markets.
  - The US is the major player (about half) with Europe dominating most of the rest in fine arts.
  - Art prices and art sales tend to match the stockmarket and financial markets.
    - Art is not only an area of “purposeless free play” (for the audience/consumer), but also a small speculative market which uses art objects for investment, tax avoidance, money laundering
- Art must hide its direct relation to the economy by claiming expressive freedom, unfettered (except by censorship, which it is obliged to fight against) and invoking the practice of DISTINCTION as its means of access and entry.
- While it can explore the darkside, the undercurrent, the deepest despair, by doing so it helps create an aura of freedom.
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## ! Thesis

- Free trade and free art are inextricably bound--a dominant system and its supplement
  - Free art disavows its relation to free trade

- Art seeks to portray novelty and provocation
  - In this it is the verso of advertising
  - "As in the parade of products in mass culture, forms and signs are mixed and matched, as if every element of the culture was an exchangeable token, as tradable as a dollar." (St 7)
- ! Why are artists so poor?
  - [http://www.xs4all.nl/~abbing/DOCeconomist/new\\_book.htm](http://www.xs4all.nl/~abbing/DOCeconomist/new_book.htm)

## A little intro to Bourdieu (Boor-d'yew)

The late Pierre Bourdieu was a major French sociologist and thinker whose work has been influential in many other areas: anthropology, education, cultural analysis, etc. *Distinction* is his major work on art and social stratification. It can be understood as a theoretical and practical “reading” of survey data based on interviews with a range of the French population in the early 60s. You can see much of the data and analysis based on the data in the appendixes and in tables in the book. There is also a fair amount of elaboration of key points in passages printed in smaller type.

It might be a bit confusing if you don't know or understand anything about French society and culture while reading the book. For example, when he discusses levels of educational achievement, he refers to the French system of diplomas for each level...it is like grade school, high school, tech school, liberal arts college, grad school, etc. You can easily see that his point is that working class people have less time and certification in education than professionals like doctors and lawyers. If you've lived in France or studied French culture, you may pick up on much of it fairly easily. Although he makes his argument in terms of France, it is, like the U.S., an advanced industrial capitalist country, and in general the same structures are found..

In terms of approaching art, Bourdieu's major and most controversial argument in *Distinction* is a critique of the dominant Western aesthetic tradition in the capitalist epoch, that is the philosophical position of the 18th century philosopher Kant who argued that the understanding and appreciation of art took place in a separate realm of the mind that was autonomous from everyday concerns. Thus art and craft are separate; things which are “useful” and “purposeful” such as pottery and wallpaper are of a distinctly lower order than things which are just to be appreciated as autonomous art objects or experiences. Thus marching band music is of a lower order than symphony hall music. This argument was powerful in its own time for establishing the autonomy of the artist, who in feudal times had been a servant of patrons (royalty, the church, or merchant class), and the specialness of art. In many ways it is like the Protestant view of religion: that one can establish a one-to-one relation with the divine without the intervention of a church organization. By separating art from society, Kant's ideas helped fuel the Romantic movement in the arts and provided a philosophical justification and explanation for the uniqueness of the art experience and of art itself. Kant's ideas today are the dominant ideas about art in intellectual circles and art schools and form the defense of the high art tradition. Linked to 20th C. modernism, Kant's general ideas inform positions such as “the true subject of art is art itself” or “art explores its nature as art” (as for example in justifications for Abstract Expressionist painting, structural/minimal experimental film, etc.)

Against this set of ideas, Bourdieu is trying to argue that “taste” is not simply a matter of aesthetic education, experience, and an innate ability of the mind, but is in fact socially constructed and determined and criss-crossed with factors of class.

Bourdieu's general importance in thinking about mass culture is that he offers a social analysis which gives a fuller understanding of taste publics, and how class and other factors operate to shape cultural activity, including consumption. The biggest drawback to Bourdieu's analysis for our purposes is that he doesn't use a data base with much television viewing or ownership. In some ways, the development of a tv culture in the US may have qualitatively changed the situation, culturally and socially.

#### Basic ideas

- aesthetic experience must be understood in terms of its social context.
- we must understand all cultural objects, not just high culture ones, in examining cultural and aesthetic life.
- there are various lifestyles which people use in cultural experience [elaborate here, the relation of lifestyle, subculture, consumption culture, class, race, and ethnic culture.]
- intellectuals tend to separate art, culture, from everyday experience, for them it is an intellectual experience. [Bodily culture: cuisine, the domestic environment , creature comforts, tend to be women's responsibility within the family division of labor.] Sports and exercise represent the other side of this: turned into a leisure industry, bodily experience separated from the everyday. Or brought back into it through an activity called health. Is psychotherapy another form of this separation of emotion and mind from body?
- working class rejection of bourgeois standards of domestic environment, makeup, etc. [to what extent is this generational? compare Hebdidge on style in youth subcultures.]

How are lifestyles produced under capitalism?

How does tv shape lifestyle and consumption style?

Does the concept of tv demographics help us understand different audiences?

Letter on sexual harrassment

Thanks for responding. We're planning on writing an editorial for the next JUMP CUT on the bigger issues here, so I appreciate your comments.

I agree with you about re-infantilizing students. I also think that in relation to male faculty and female students, the student is often way more sophisticated than the professor.

And I think Title IX is being used to address a real problem of sexual aggression on campus.

I think there's been an imperfect storm of multiple causes and unintended effects.

To start, there's the long standing neglect of the issue of rape and sexual assault and harassment on campus. This lies mostly at the feet of the administration.

I think it has been kickstarted by government action that was first around these issues in the military. That raised some issues but had a limit since politicians accepted the military's version of command decisions to overrule the rules. Key activists moved on to campus issues.

The massive neglect on campus has varied a bit from place to place, but has also produced spectacular cases: e.g., a year and a half ago at Oregon with members of the champ basketball team not being restricted in any way despite charges against them until the day after UO was dropped from the final playoffs. It's clear again and again that star athletes get special treatment about these issues, just like NBA and NFL stars.

This year a woman who sued UO because they were not treating her rape/assault complaint in a timely manner discovered the university lawyers had gone to the student counseling center where she had had counseling and therapy after the rape and they seized her records to use in building a case against her complaint. After several days of statewide publicity, the University president said the files would not be used (but of course they'd already been seen).

Part of this is also due to the peculiar rules around drinking on campus. They drive students to binge drink before events because they are policed at events. Thus way too much alcohol is consumed in a big hurry before football games, etc at any campus event.

One of the core problems that I see is that the way it is being done now is without due process. You have administrative officers who are investigator, hearing officer, and judge all in one, and who can easily become out of control, arrogant, and are often untrained in ideas of justice and due process. As in Kipnis' case, there are multiple cases around the country of people being told they are being investigated without ever knowing the charge, and the accuser is often anonymous. The accused is not given the opportunity to know the charge in advance of a hearing, or to have a lawyer present, or record the

proceedings, or face the accuser. The accused is given little time and no resources to mount a defense , get evidence and witnesses.

From an online comment:

The frequency of these kangaroo courts and the exponential growth of Title IX administration are the result of the recent DOE mandate to judge Title IX cases according to the preponderence of the evidence rather than a beyond a reasonable doubt standard. The justification for the preponderence of the evidence standard seems to be that (1) there weren't enough guilty verdicts, and (2) this standard works fine for civil cases.

In the usual civil case, a preponderence of evidence works because a neutral judge decides what evidence should be considered by the trier of fact (jury) in accordance with evidentiary rules which have been established by courts and legal institutes. The general goal of the rules of evidence is to establish a fair procedure. In a civil case, the parties will know what evidence will be introduced at trial and the parties may have an attorney assist at all phases of the procedure.

In a Title IX hearing, apparently there are no rules and the same person(s) who issue a finding will decide what evidence will be used and whether or not the parties will have access to this evidence. This is categorically an affront to due process.

The appropriate standard in any case where the determination may be punitive to the extent that someone may be banned from college or lose their job is a beyond any reasonable doubt standard. All parties should have access to attorneys at all stages of the proceeding and also all evidence. Anything less is abusive and violates due process.

Me again:

Case in point out here in Oregon,. A friend of ours, a foreign graduate student, who is married but separated from her husband (who is back in her home country), was officially informed by the Title IX compliance officer that she was under investigation because an anonymous person had complained that she was having a sexual affair with a faculty member. It was true: she is in her mid-20s and was in a relationship with a male faculty member (who they were investigating about another matter—possible discrimination against a transsexual for “outing” the person by using the wrong pronoun) in a different department.

He was not in any supervisory function of her academic work, not on her diss committee, ...nothing. They insisted she had to come in for an interview, without a lawyer or any other person, and fully explain the situation of which the office would keep a detailed record. But she couldn't record it. She went to a lawyer and made a sworn affidavit that yes she was in a sexual relation with a faculty

member and sent it to them.

This was not enough. They insisted that she had to appear in person, without anyone else, without a lawyer, so they could decide if she had been “coerced” into signing the affidavit. She refused. Her instructorship and her student visa situation may well be at risk as a result. In any case, there is now a legal record that her husband back home might use in any divorce proceedings. And the university is trying to fire the tenured prof.

The new faculty union here just had a person from the national office come in and do an analysis of the university budget (they claim all has to be frozen for the next two years). He's an accounting prof, and showed with available stats that while faculty salaries have been static for a decade, administrative salaries have skyrocketed (highest in a comparison with 10 peer institutions). What we're seeing is not solving the problems Title IX is supposed to be addressing, but instead more positions created within the admin to have more people in more offices. They need to look like they are busy.

I think that the key issue for me and where I think I agree with Kipnis is about student/faculty relationships. I think they are unwise for both parties, but I also recognize that they occur and I think the current NU policy simply drives the situation underground into deceit and lies, etc. Instead (and this was what the former NU policy was that I had to explain to the TAs every year when I was Director of Grad Studies), if you start a relationship you must immediately notify your superior, supervisor, dept. head whatever and formally arrange to remove any and all supervision, grading, etc. regarding the student. Awkward but doable.

In my field and the closely related departments of theatre, dance, performance studies, etc. there are often and frequently very close and physical encounters: the production, the shoot, the performance, etc. that mixes students and faculty and whose emotional tension lends itself to certain set ups that may never happen in math or poli sci or mechanical engineering instruction. Things can proceed very fast. And perhaps in certain populations such as some gay male subcultures which in a small town college or even the anonymity of a big city bar culture may produce unanticipated hookups. It happens, I think you just have to be realistic and have a practical solution in advance.

Anyway, this ramble is sort of a draft set of notes for some of what I'm thinking of. Any further ideas?

## Chuck on Brakhage

The late Stan Brakhage was the preeminent American experimental film artist in the second half of the 20th century. From his initial fame as a young genius of the avant garde and a leading polemicist in establishing independent film among the arts in the early Sixties, he moved to a position of seniority and recognition, if not universal acclaim. The American Federation of Arts bestowed official acknowledgement of Brakhage as a film artist by giving him the first one-person retrospective in their prestigious series of packaged film programs aimed at the museum audience. His major writing since *Metaphors on Vision*, 1963, appeared in a hefty anthology, *Brakhage Scrapbook*, and his prolific film output continued to inspire programmers and critics. His occasional one-person shows in major venues were always important events in the experimental film calendar. And after years of making a living for himself and his family by lecturing and teaching as a commuter, he attained a regular position in his Rocky Mountain home area at the University of Colorado. His late cancer and death brought new attention to his career and commemoration in the form of a two disk DVD of representative major work.

Stan Brakhage did more than any other filmmaker in history to explore the expressive potential of silent, color, non-dramatic film. He did this by pushing the concept of film as self-expression and self-exploration to its limits. The camera eye is the creative I. The

unique moment of perception, the phenomenology of the perceptual field, and its connection with and mediation of personal and public life, the individual and the social extensions of perception, cognition, and memory, are all explored by Brakhage. In this he belongs among the great pioneers of visual and cinematic knowledge, and his place in the film medium's aesthetic history is secure. Brakhage achieved this position by severely limiting the medium's usual communicative function and by pursuing the ethos of the individual Romantic artist struggling to obtain an inner vision in a degraded historical world. Thus Brakhage rightly belongs at the center of P. Adam Sitney's authoritative consideration of U.S. experimental cinema, *Visionary Film*, for in both example and achievement, Brakhage stands as the great master of avant garde film in the U.S.

But for those who reject visionary Romanticism as a sufficient or desirable artistic mode, Brakhage remains the supreme example of an idealist artist alienated from social and political reality, a patriarch whose present prestige (there is precious little power to be traded in the film avant garde) stands in the way of newer experimental developments. What Brakhage represents is the achievement of a certain phase of the New American Cinema at a time when the hegemony of the visionary style is being challenged. If for no other reason than his prestige, historical place, and prolific production, Brakhage remains the starting point for any encompassing assessment of U.S. experimental film today. Even those who want to dismiss him, as Jonathan Rosenbaum did in his

book, *Film: The Front Line* 1983, find that they cannot ignore him. But how we can understand and assess his work remains a problem to be worked out, especially if we find his own statements and those of his admiring commentators questionable. This is especially so if we find the (usually) uninformed dismissal of Brakhage equally questionable. We need to get beyond the legend to see the film work anew--to find a radical aesthetic sufficient for the films.

### The Legend

I once met Stan the man, but before that I knew very well Stan the legend from the films, the writings, the criticism, and of course from that staple of art world communication, the gossip. In terms of understanding his art, the legend is essential, for Brakhage created and perpetuated his own mythology (a necessary and inevitable act--) and made it central to his own film work. This is distinctly disturbing within a formalist critical climate because formalism begins with rejecting the artist's biography, with discarding as irrelevant any statement or notion of intention. The text is supposed to stand alone and reveal itself by its own exquisite logic, by close study of its formal qualities and arrangements. For example, we never need to know if the loft in *Wavelength* is Michael Snow's or someone else's, or if the people who appear in the film are friends, family, or paid actors. It doesn't matter if Snow took the photo on the far wall or not. But it matters very much that we know in the *Sincerity* films that this is the Brakhage family and that this is their log cabin in Colorado. Similarly, Hollis Frampton's

*Zorn's Lemma* can be adequately (if not fully) dissected and understood without any knowledge of or reference to Frampton's personal life. But we can't fully comprehend *Window Water Baby Moving* without knowing that the woman depicted is Jane Brakhage, the filmmaker's wife, and that the man's face we see at the end is Stan filmed by her. And in fact knowing even more than that was thought important by both of them. Thus Jane Brakhage writes an essay for Film Culture, "The Birth Film," about the experience; and the long interview with Stan introducing his major essay, *Metaphors on Vision*, contains an extended discussion of the film's making.

We can understand many of Brakhage's films only through the biography and the critical-theoretical apparatus he's put forth--either directly as in his writings, interviews, and public statements, or indirectly through the privileged knowledge of his critics. For example, Marjorie Keller's close reading of *Murder Psalm* depends on her extra-textual knowledge gained as one of Brakhage's students, as she herself notes. For those outside the legend, they may experience many Brakhage films as baffling at best and frequently they turn back on the work and its maker in rejection.

Rejection of a (sometimes) more informed variety marks many left and feminist reactions to Brakhage. Jonathan Rosenbaum polemically attacks Brakhage's work and legend.

I am still waiting...for a critique of Brakhage that begins to deal critically with the familial, patriarchal, and phallogocentric side of his work and the reactionary political stance that inevitably derives from it.

And he expands the charge with a critique of

a sort of metaphysical conceit underlying the whole American avant-garde romantic tradition--a central aspect of the work of Brakhage, Noren, Benning, Jost, Robert Nelson, and countless others, which reduces the universe to a list of male possessions: This is my wife, my child, my gun, myth camera, my house, my car, my summer vacation, my life. And while the possessiveness of Mekas (and accompanying self-aggrandizement) has relatively little of the offensiveness--and much less of the formal complexity--of Brakhage, it still rests on an unproblematic embrace of The Essential Verities that are somehow taken to be outside all history and ideology, an assumption of innocence that cannot help but give off a certain whiff of complacency even while it makes a certain form of simplicity and poetic insight possible.

There are several important matters here for Rosenbaum's argument is substantial though terse.

Because my book is in part an extended meditation on the present possibilities of romantic aesthetics and practices and their political significance, it will gradually become clear why and where I differ. In brief, my argument assumes that romanticism is inherent to the bourgeois and capitalist era. It will not be decisively superseded as a set of artistic options and concerns until capitalism itself is superseded. Even within existing socialism's context, romanticism remains a viable aesthetic possibility, though not the only one. Subsequent artistic reactions to the strictly defined Romantic movement never really overcome the basic ideological structures and stances of romanticism. Even those twentieth century film

artists who seem to reject most decisively the baggage of romanticism and its later transformation into realism, such as (in Rosenbaum's pantheon) Chantal Akerman, Peter Gidal, Yvonne Rainer, Michael Snow, and Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet (to take only the most self and critically proclaimed anti-romantic and anti-realist figures the critic praises) turn out to be refractory cases still fitting the overall paradigm.

Born in the 19th century, Romanticism fully flowers in the 19th, and works out its various possibilities, including those specific sub-movements that claim to be anti-romantic. For all intents and purposes, the 20th century displays the extension, expansion, and repetition of those forms and norms. Because of this, the basic premise of Sitney's Visionary Film can make so much sense: the American film avant garde from 1943 to 1978 repeats and encapsulates the internal developmental pattern of romantic poetry (particularly British poetry, following Siteney's mentor critic, Harold Bloom). Ontogeny repeats phylogeny.

Romanticism, the art paradigm of the capitalist era, arising in reaction to previous art traditions, changed the meaning of art and its role in society as well as the role of the artist. It stressed the unique individual and his/her achievements. By promoting singularity and individualism, making the person the measure rather than his or her family, lineage, or property, individual creativity and originality were stressed over adherence to tradition, accepted rules or imitation of past masters in art. Because it valued individual consciousness and subjectivity, it privileged the private part of perception, cognition, and memory. Dream and fantasy and

eventually the unconscious were recognized as valid personal experiences and artistic materials. From the ecstatic disorientation or unfulfilled love in Goethe's young Werther to the intoxicated reveries of DeQuincy's opium eater, forms of altered perception and heightened experience were validated: physical and religious ecstasy, love, drugs, art, fevered illness. Against the regularity and uniformity of neo-classicism, the fragmented, incomplete, mixed, and grotesque were celebrated. Against the assumption that the general social order is the primary place of self-understanding, the Romantics from Wordsworth to Thoreau found nature the site of self-examination.

Validating the personal produced a new recognition by male artists of the domestic sphere as the center of personal life and thereby part of art. Additionally, previously ignored segments of the population were included in the acceptable subject matter for art. In addition to rulers, aristocrats, military figures and merchants, ordinary people--workers and peasants--were depicted, though often by strongly sentimentalizing their poverty and harsh physical labor and conditions. For the first time childhood was recognized as a special state of life, free from some of the imposed restraints of social rules for adults. The allure of exoticism was added to national and racial difference and non-Western people were seen as interesting, child-like primitives.

In ideological terms the effect of this validation of the personal and the expression of private experience was the place individuals outside of power, apart from the public sphere, for their self-definition. The personal was the starting point for the political. The

democratic state, it was claimed, existed to promote the pursuit of happiness. While romanticism contained a strong attack on rationalism and organized religion, it also held to a new mystical moral-aesthetic sensibility. Some of this produced a nostalgia for the past that could be paired with a sense of the future as void. Romanticism could be oriented to an eventual return to religion through a mystical view of nature, belief in the supernatural, or the practice of ritualized devotion.

In this context Brakhage can be seen as a quintessentially romantic artist. His various writings could serve as a handbook of romantic dogma.

Imagine an eye unruly by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure in perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of "Green?" How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can they eye be? Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible gradations of color. Imagine a world before the "beginning was the word."-- Metaphors on vision.

My first instruction, then: if you happen to have a light meter--give it away....--A Motion Picture Giving and Taking Book.

## Marx on Commodity Fetishism

This rather dense piece is a “philosophical” passage from the first section of Marx’s three-volume Capital. Marx’s goal in his book is to examine how then-emerging large scale industrial capitalism works, and most of the study is based in detailed economic and historical analysis. In the section at hand, Marx provides a general overview of the processes and characteristics of capitalist production.

The key observation here is that under modern industrial capitalism, those things produced circulate in such a way that the social relations which underpin commodity production and exchange are mysterious or hidden. It’s useful to remember that while Marx was a socialist and critical of the inequalities of capitalism, in Capital his main project is to understand how the system works, and that he thought that capitalism actually lead to a new stage of social/historical development. Capitalism, as a mode of production, by massing resources (the means of production such as land, raw materials, industrial tools, transportation, etc.), and encouraging industrial development, increases productivity on a massive scale. Some of the value resulting from the productive process goes to maintaining the system (workers and their families, replacing industrial things that wear out, government, etc.), some of it goes to the capitalists as profit, but the “genius” of the system is that it produces vastly more which can be re-invested in increasing production (research, more machines, better facilities, better communication systems, etc.) and thus the system as a whole grows.

In contrast to feudalism, which has fairly obvious social relations (the peasant works land owned by the master who is also functionally if not actually the government; the peasant family must give a large portion of what they produce directly to the owner, part to the church, etc.), under the greatly increased division of labor of capitalism, social relations are obscured. While the rural peasant takes care of most needs directly on the land, in an urban industrial setting, people are increasingly drawn into specialized production and consumption, and thus exchange and its vehicle, money, takes place. However everything tends to become commodified: thus the worker exchanges his/her labor-power for money and then for commodities which are needed for the reproduction of life (food, housing, clothing, etc.). The overall system obscures social relations which makes it hard to understand them.

The importance of this passage for our course of study is that it indicates that while we “see” commodities when we go shopping, or use them in daily life, and thus tend to understand them as “natural,” we seldom understand the elaborate web of social relations that govern their production and distribution. Marx wants us to realize that that the process of exchange under capitalism actually makes it hard to understand many aspects of society and how it functions. The commodity appears to be autonomous, whereas it is actually merely the surface appearance of social relations.

## Veblen

Veblen, a U.S. sociologist working at the end of the 19th C, writes a major work on *The Theory of the Leisure Class* which brings forward the concept of “conspicuous consumption.” Often known as the Gilded Age, the period was notable for new wealth, often ostentatiously displayed, particularly by the nouveau riche. This is the terrain of novelists such as Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Marcel Proust.

He argues that while ostentatious consumption has throughout history been a common marker of power and authority, that in the modern capitalist age, it takes a somewhat different form with the successful man’s worth being established by and through his wife

and children. The virtues of the early Republic--thrift, discipline, and denial--are replaced with the change to a credit economy, the encouragement of display in consumption, and more pronounced social stratification. For a contemporary example, think of celebrity culture--entertainment or sports figures who have suddenly acquired money (that is income, not real wealth in most cases) and have an entourage, the trappings of a rich lifestyle, etc. Or think of the public signifiers of power and prestige: the doorman in the fancy uniform at the front of the expensive hotel, the stretch limo or the private jet used for travel, etc.

Veblen points out that conspicuous consumption has a significant social function. Thus the expensive wedding establishes and re-inforces social position in the community and is actually functional, not frivolous. Veblen sees the role of the wealthy man's wife as especially being a display of his economic power: thus the expensive clothing, luxurious domestic space, etc. serves to announce power.

Interestingly, Adorno was a hostile critic of Veblen. Veblen tends to see art as a social adornment rather than a human necessity, and is clearly critical of using art as a vehicle for social prestige. However in terms of political analysis, Veblen's analysis of the subordinate position of women and children might be more productive for both analysis and social action. Adorno, "Veblen's Attack on Culture," in Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, [1967] 1981).

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## Communications/Technology/Progress a presentation for the Communications Domain Dinner

Chuck Kleinhans

OK, let me ask everyone, with a show of hands--how many of you really hate record scratches and tape hiss?

Yeah, me too. Maybe I'm on the wrong side of this debate: CDs are great, though obviously they were introduced with an eye to re-selling us music we already bought.

So, in the largest sense, unless we believe in a Golden Age in the distant past, we have to say, "well yes, technological change contributes to progress." But we also know, as working professionals, that claims made for technological change in communications are most often simply marketing hype or delusional examples of historical amnesia.

So, I have to agree with Joel Mokyr that in the epochal framework, the printing press is an advance in world history. Though I'd be quick to add that photography and offset lithography are equally deserving of pride of place in the technology-of-progress pantheon, especially in the hallmark of 20th century modernity: changing from a printed word to a visual culture.

But I'd also ask everyone in the audience if they remember the wonderful promise put forward in the early 1980s of the "paperless office" as personal computers changed our lives as corporate drones.

What's on your Powerbook? What's in your briefcase? Has it gotten heavier over the years, even if you've been pushing on that Nautilus workout station? A quick check with my Department Assistant and the School of Speech's Manager of Business Operations tells me that the amount of paper consumed per capita at Northwestern has drastically increased, not declined, with a workstation on every desk.

So, my argument centers on the way we define "progress" in this debate. As we know, the inherent optimism of North Americans

about change producing progress is a characteristic that inevitably skews our thinking about this matter. But since we were talking about the printing press, let me remind you that the great optimist of communications technology producing progressive change, Marshall McLuhan, made his most substantial intellectual and scholarly argument in his study of printing, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, which examined the change from an oral to a print culture in the West. Where he went off the deep end was precisely in optimistically thinking that the change from a print to a media culture in the second half of the 20th century would mirror the earlier epochal change, and in short order.

Isolating technological change from economic, social, and political relations and institutions always goes wrong. Let's ask a different question: What pushes the need for new technology in our time? Karl Marx answered that question this way:

Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange--of the means of communication and transport--the annihilation of space by time--becomes an extraordinary necessity for it.  
(*Grundrisse*, 1857-8)

Technological change, technological progress in communications, is not autonomous; it is not simply due to transforming scientific discovery into engineered invention. And invention into commodity. And such change itself is not accelerating in the way usually assumed by the "Information Revolution" rhetoric.

In fact, technological change in communications serves not to drastically change, but to re-imprint existing social relations, existing power relations. Changes in modern communications systems have been accommodated by existing social formations. As historian Fernand Braudel argues, there are always brakes and accelerators in technological history. The system tends toward equilibrium. As Brian Winston argues in his book *Media Technology and Society*, the social necessity for innovation and change is balanced by the suppression of new technology's radical potential.

Simple example: a few months ago I was walking into the Jewel to do my food shopping; just ahead of me a guy pulled out his cell phone, dialed in, and proceeded around the store. We happened to be

sharing the same route through the store, and I quickly realized that as he kept on talking, that he was checking every purchase with his spouse. He described the five packages of chuck roast and then took the one she directed him to take. New form of communication? New form of control? Surveillance ? Sure. And if hubby can't be expected to stay home and babysit the kids and clean the floors, at least he can pitch in on the household tasks by shopping. And if he can't be trained to make intelligent shopping decisions, at least he can be wrangled into cooperating. I think this is how most people, most of the time, actually use new communications technologies--slightly modifying but not fundamentally changing social relations.

But why do people *think* that technological change produces a qualitatively new environment? Why is it that McLuhanistic fantasy about the near future, about social transformation emerging from this or that new communications commodity is so common?

It's due to more than people being seduced by advertising or the pundits of WIRED magazine.. There is an experiential event that often takes place with new technology that needs to be understood. People of practical sense and good will actually have experiences with communications technology that they regard as new and different. Especially people who use the technology to create new content. So, even if, in the long view, the newest example of technical development is really an engineering refinement, not a fundamentally different form, to the specialist, the creative person, the artist working with it, it does seem new--especially if it changes the way in which one works, the way in which one produces, the way in which one imagines the horizons of style.

Last night I visited a media artist who showed me his new project. I'm writing a catalogue essay for an exhibit of new digital art, and the show's curator, Paul Hertz, and I looked at the latest version. I worked with the project--a CD ROM which could be called a "computer game" in shorthand. Afterwards the three of us discussed, in a fairly theoretical way, the relation of interactivity to narration. The artist, Jim Ferolo, was clearly impasioned and inspired in the project and saw it as producing a new form of mediated narration. I'd agree, but perhaps I'm merely reproducing my own knowledge and practice. Jim Ferolo is an advanced MFA student in my department, and he took my film theory course. He analyzed his own interests in terms of a concept--"cinema of

attractions"--recently developed in the revisionist analysis of film history and narrative. So this discussion was at the same time based in a reconsideration of early cinema (sometimes called primitive cinema), and Eisenstein's theory and practice of the 1920s, and the reconsideration of fairground theatre, amusement parks, nickelodeons, and circus in terms of modernity. But it was also grounded in an existential, experiential, phenomenological understanding of the screen display and the puzzle solving game I'd just experienced. My understanding was theoretical and embodied at the same time. Jim Ferolo's project is aimed at refiguring narrative using a new communicative technology. Nothing new under the sun? Been there done that? Or a bold breakthrough to a new form of consciousness, a cyberpunk future of jacking in?

I think you can read it either way. But maybe we're asking the wrong questions. The questions that are on the distant horizon here that must be brought closer to the center are ones like: what is progress? who pays? who benefits? for what end? Are we talking about new narratives for the Disney Corporation, or new narratives for people seeking social justice? It's not just the technology, its the software. And it's the ethical sense and moral reasoning behind that. And the economic, social, and political structures that inform that. At least, that's what I think most of us are teaching.

So, while planning for this debate, I ran into David Abramson, and remarked that I had been down at the University of Chicago's Seminary Coop Bookstore, and while looking for another book needed for research, of course came across one I just *had* to buy to prepare for this event. He said that he prefers Amazon.com. and began to sing its praises, and I responded that he was just trying to convert me to his position in this debate. But of course, browsing in a crowded, dusty, and overheated basement, or pointing and clicking on the Internet, we aren't all that different--we're both professors who love to shop for new books. Technological change, but same old behaviors. And inscribed within commodity consumption.,

But communications technology can also give rise to uncertainty and anxiety. After agreeing to participate in this debate, we were notified to "dress up" because the administration wanted it videotaped. Suddenly the live performance, the dog and pony show, becomes a recorded object. Am I just sharing in a university community? Talking with my peer professionals? Or is there also an issue of

power here? And intellectual property? Are these my ideas? How will they be used? for what purpose? do I have control of their publication?

Progress--we can't speak it without talking about history, about social relations, about power.

Review for final  
313-2, Contemporary Documentary Film

We have seen work that is very personal, in which the filmmaker or the subject of the film speaks directly to us, as well as work that is more 'objective' or 'dispassionate.' Is one approach more realistic than the other? what do we mean by realism?

Here are some possible categories for organizing the work we've seen

Storytelling

This American Life (episode)  
'Picture Me Rolling: Shomari's Story,'  
Halsted Street, USA  
Saddle Sores  
Taxicab Confessions  
Stigmata  
Papapap'  
Four Little Girls  
Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control  
Finding Christa  
The Poet and the Con  
Brother's Keeper  
Ghetto Life 101

Experimental/Personal

Lost Book Found  
Saddle Sores  
Craig Baldwin on mock documentary  
Papapap'  
Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control  
Finding Christa  
The Poet and the Con

personal life

An American Love Story  
Saddle Sores  
'Picture Me Rolling: Shomari's Story,'  
Taxicab Confessions  
Valley Town  
Finding Christa  
The Poet and the Con  
Black Tar Heroin: The Dark End of the Street  
Brother's Keeper  
Uncensored and Untamed: Pamela [Anderson] and Tommy Lee  
Ghetto Life 101

Events/History

Halsted Street, USA  
After Stonewall  
Valley Town  
Four Little Girls

## Black Tar Heroin: The Dark End of the Street Brother's Keeper

We've also dealt with questions of entertainment--that is, making documentaries which grab an audience's attention and which are fairly slickly made and/or which deal with an unusual or controversial subject, and which may move towards exploiting the subject. Thus Fox network documentaries, such as COPS or When Animals Attack or World's Scariest Police Chases, stress the dramatic moment and danger, but clearly with an intention to entertain rather than actually inform. Fox, since it sells commercials, clearly is motivated by commercial considerations.

MTV and VH-1 make formulaic documentaries about musicians and bands, but also on exploitable topics such as the sex industry, rock and porn, as well as their standby series, such as Real Life and Road Rules. This type of voyeuristic camera documentary has now been combined with the contest format in the new summer series on the networks such as Survivor (CBS).

HBO and other subscription cable services have also dealt with sex, in particular, as in Pimps Up, Ho's Down, Real Sex series, but also drug culture, Black Tar Heroin. PBS is much more tame, but does sometimes present the unusual, as in Brother's Keeper

The internet, first with Jennicam, and now with dozens if not hundreds of voyeur-cam sites, especially pornographic ones, has proliferated this kind of 'real life'documentary.

How do we understand this 'new addition'to documentary of entertainment? Is it different than the celebrity documentary of Don't Look Back (on Bob Dylan), or various rock concert documentaries (Woodstock, etc.)? When did the staged and celebrity documentary begin? Perhaps with Triumph of the Will? (Leni Reifenstahl's famous documentary about Hitler and his rallies).

[Text only version](#)--needs footnotes

## **Cultural Appropriation and Subcultural Expression: The Dialectics of Cooptation and Resistance**

A paper for presentation to the Northwestern University Center for the Humanities, Monday Nov. 14, 1994, 4-5:30 pm, Ver Steeg Faculty Lounge, University Library version 2.3

[For a decade or so it has been commonplace in academic presentations of film and video analysis to show clips (just as art historians show slides). It is now possible to store and retrieve articles with clips on the Internet and the World Wide Web. In a few years much scholarship of this kind will be electronically published, and student film and tv analysis "papers" will routinely include clips. ]

[- Chuck Kleinhans](#)

A lot of the people in cultural studies these days kind of remind me of the FBI in the fifties: They find subversion everywhere. --Greil Marcus.

The questions I want to examine are: how do subcultures appropriate from the dominant culture, particularly its mass culture, and how does that dominant mass culture in turn appropriate from subcultures?[1] Does such dual appropriation promote or undermine assimilation and/or identity? And, given that there are distinct power differentials between the consciousness industry and cultural expressions by subordinate groups, what kind of resistance is possible and effective? While a short essay cannot do justice to the complexity of all the issues involved, I can advance an argument for constructing further studies which can give the social and historical context for the processes. I should also note that inevitably this discussion connects with some issues well known in other frameworks such as the nature of the culture industry, issues of postmodernism, the relations of gender, race, and class in cultural analysis, identity politics, and activist media making.[2]

I've been involved with this matter of subcultures and appropriation for some time, starting in the 1960's while working in the underground press and the counterculture and seeing the subsequent changes in youth culture and the commercial music industry. So my experience is partly practical and historical, but it has also been critical and theoretical. In fact, for the most part, initially the critical questions were raised in the context of practical matters. Working on an underground newspaper and sympathetic to both sides, I had to balance the desires of the "politicos" for more news of protests and analysis of events against the expectations of the "freaks" and "hippies" for coverage of

sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. Long meetings argued out decisions such as printing the John Lennon and Yoko Ono "Two Virgins" album photo and probably being banned from university distribution or even arrested for publishing full frontal nudity. Or, on another occasion the question was, does a rock dance to benefit an anti-Vietnam war project somehow become "really political" when the accompanying light show includes slides of last week's demonstration on campus and last spring's March on Washington? The "politics of representation" had a decidedly pragmatic edge, and the results of decision could be immediately apparent.

To examine mass culture and the possibilities of creating oppositional cultural work, I've chosen two examples, one from the 19th century, and one from today, which dramatize this question in terms of issues of class, gender, and race. So this topic fits within the larger current terms of multiculturalism and "identity politics." As such this issue is rather hotly contested in cultural studies. What is the relation of subcultures to the dominant culture, particularly those subcultures which exist in a subordinate relation to the norm and which contain artists, intellectuals, and cultural workers of one kind or another who see themselves as working within a subculture and yet also trying to transform the boundary of that subculture and the values, framework, and active ideology of the dominant culture? Many of the issues that have been taken up in art of the past decade operate in such a framework: AIDS, censorship, women's rights, homelessness, racism, imperial war, gender identity, and sexuality, to name a few.

The currently contested question: is the special subculture response or reading, subversive of the existing order? In books such as *Television Culture*, *Reading the Popular*, and *Power Plays/Power Works* and in various articles, John Fiske stands at the front of those making the argument for subversive readings of mass culture, for the idea that consumers of mass culture have an active facility for resistance in reading mass culture texts. Fiske argues against traditional Marxist aesthetics, which simply endorsed high culture and regretted the workers didn't have access to it under capitalism, as well as against the Frankfurt School, especially Theodor W. Adorno as exemplified by the essay "The Culture Industry," which assumed that mass culture totally controlled the minds of the masses. By granting the audience almost complete autonomy to construct meaning, Fiske pushes an impulse to democratizing media reception about as far as it can go without becoming purely relativistic.

From within cultural studies, the argument that the audience determines the meaning has been criticized. For example Meaghan Morris observes,

...the thesis of cultural studies as Fiske and [Ian] Chambers present it runs perilously close to this kind of formulation: people in modern mediatized societies are complex and contradictory, mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory, therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture. To add that this popular culture has critical and resistant elements is tautological--unless one (or a predicated someone, that Other who needs to be told) has a concept of culture so rudimentary that it excludes criticism and resistance from the practice of everyday life. (24-25)

Morris is on target within the field of U.S. cultural studies.[3] But she does not take into account the rather entrenched status of the "audience as dupes" model dominant in the work of (I assume liberal) Neil Postman and Mark Crispin Miller on television, or late Frankfurt School empiricism of George Gerbner, or the openly left models of Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller.

Very hostile criticism of Fiske's type of analysis also arises outside of cultural studies. A good example comes from media sociologist Todd Gitlin in a highly partisan essay:

Twenty years on, avant-garde shock has become routine, and avant-gardistes have to go farther and farther out to prove they haven't been taken in. Meanwhile, some of yesterday's outriders of youth culture have become theorists scavenging the clubs, back alleys, and video channels for a "resistance" they are convinced, *a priori*, must exist. Failing to find radical potential in the politics of parties or mass movements, they exalt "resistance" in subcultures, or, one step on, in popular styles, or even, to take it one step further--in the observation that viewers watch TV with any attitude other than devoted rapture. "Resistance"--meaning all sorts of grumbling, multiple interpretation, semiological inversion, pleasure, rage, friction, numbness, what have you--is accorded dignity, even glory, by stamping these not-so-great refusals with a vocabulary derived from life-threatening political work against fascism--as if the same concept should serve for the Chinese student uprising and cable TV grazing. Some have found the new theoretical grail in sitcoms, some in slash and cult movies, some in the pace of MTV, some in the long tracking shot, some in punk, some in pornography--and the list grows with the ingenuity. Hegelian to the core, this line of thought agrees that somewhere in the culture "the resistance" must exist. (Gitlin, 191)[4]

In a much more detailed and considered article, Michael Budd, Robert Entman, and Clay Steinman have critiqued what they call the "affirmative character" of cultural studies which ends up celebrating the status quo:

First, it overestimates the freedom of audiences in reception. Second, it minimizes the commodification of audiences as analyzed by a political-economic approach. Third, it fails to differentiate between mass advertising and specialized media. Fourth, it confuses active reception with political activity. Finally, it takes the exceptional situation of progressive readings promoted within oppositional subcultures as the norm. (169)

In this debate, I find some agreement with both sides. Certainly Fiske in particular is prone to overgeneralization from scanty data, seems unable to learn even from his friendly critics, and in his investigations of phenomena such as the Madonna fans and African American cultural practices has a tendency to become the Expert Explainer of Others.[5] At the same time, his work is motivated by a strong democratic impulse to account for otherwise unacknowledged, unstudied, or marginalized parts of the

population, precisely those people overlooked by the grand overgeneralizations of both the empirical and critical traditions in mass communications research.

And in part Gitlin is right: one doesn't have to attend too many conference panels or read too many articles submitted for publication to find extreme claims about cultural subversion made with little effort to back up the critical insight with historical research, serious ethnographic analysis, confirmation from readily available empirical data, or some even a review of the pertinent literature. But it is not fair to judge the validity of an intellectual area by its worst examples. I wonder if Gitlin has really read the best. For example, he mentions celebration of slasher films, but the best study, Carol Clover's Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film is a reasoned attempt to explain why it is possible for some people, including women and feminists, to find pleasure in some of these films. Similarly, most of the feminists writing cultural analyses of pornography such as Linda Williams and Laura Kipnis are not celebrating it or claiming it is liberating. Rather they are trying to understand the complexities of the texts and the audience's responses. Gitlin and Budd, Entman, and Steinman carefully mention feminism in their essays, but seem unfamiliar with the major work in feminist cultural studies and oblivious to gay/lesbian/queer gender analysis and critics dealing with racial representation. I want to argue that both extremes of this debate fail to take into account the specifically dual nature of subcultural reading, that it exists as a dialectical process, and remains in many ways in tension rather than resolved in its very interpretation.

### The Cakewalk

While we might argue that the situation of powerlessness is not ironic to those who suffer it, we would also have to recognize that one of the ways that the oppressed have dealt with their situation is by themselves being ironic about it, by making jokes about it, in a protective and tendentious way. Take the example of the cakewalk, a processional dance originating in the ante-bellum plantation South of the U.S. Originally the cakewalk was a show arranged for the entertainment of the white masters. The black slaves were given cast-off clothing, finery unsuitable for their ordinary labor, and thus dressed up they proceeded to parade (often with a cake as the prize for the best couple or for the team when one plantation competed against another). From its origins, the cakewalk combined two different dance traditions: a shuffling processional as established in African tribal dances and the European derived grand parade introduction to a ball. Thus it was a fusion of a displaced folk dance and formally organized social dance. But as a show and contest dance, it invited stylization and exaggeration. For the masters there was considerable amusement in seeing the slaves in totally "inappropriate" clothing, making extreme gestures, acting as if they had the refined manners of the gentry. Yet for the slaves who participated, as hateful as this scorn might have been, the dance was also an opportunity to mock the masters' manners. Whites remained amused and superior, the controllers of a contest for a sugary treat, a kind of racist infantilization by the masters. At the same time, African Americans could spot the subversive ridicule involved. Everyone laughed, but one side laughed differently than the other.

After the Civil War the cakewalk, synchronized with African rhythms, continued in various forms including the minstrel and vaudeville show. It had earlier developed from a shuffle step to full fledged walk. Moved to the entertainment stage, its performers developed a highly articulated and exaggerated strut. (Although the cakewalk is no longer a social dance, we can still witness this kind of theatricalized strut in the marching bands of historically black colleges and universities, and its virtuoso performance by the drum major.) The earliest moving images of the cakewalk are from a later period (around the turn of the century), presumably of professional cakewalkers, perhaps members of a minstrel show troupe, and they reveal the dancers' flamboyant energy. From the visual evidence we can see how blacks ironically mocked the whites' fancy manners in a comic form which safely contained but certainly did not eliminate social criticism. [[clip, Watch Me Move: 1:30](#)]

Essentially contradictory, on one level the stage representation contributed to the racist myth of the happy plantation, and on another, it revealed the persistence of a critique within popular art forms. This genre should remind us that irony does not reside in the work; rather, it derives from a stance people take toward art. All works can be regarded ironically; though clearly some works invite an ironic stance more than others. And some parts of the mass audience are more prone to read against the grain than others.[6]

The reason we have images of the cakewalk in early film is due in large part to the post-Civil War theatricalized cakewalk becoming the first African American dance to cross over into national social dance. It also became an international dance craze, and in the 1890s some African American dance teams achieved national prominence for doing the cakewalk. Charles Johnson and Dora Dean became famous interpreters, followed by Bert Williams and George Walker who toured Europe and made it fashionable by teaching it to the Prince of Wales.

A later example of a cakewalk, this one from the 1943 Hollywood Black-cast musical *Stormy Weather* shows the industrial culture appropriation of a vernacular form.[7] To set the scene: Bill "Bojangles" Robinson has returned from World War 1 with other African American veterans. Still in uniform (a mark of patriotism and social leveling), they meet at a large dance hall in Harlem. Robinson dances with Lena Horne, and they are shown to be attracted to each other. Then a cakewalk begins, in typical Hollywood musical fantasy, with a huge dance chorus all out of proportion to what a club could afford, and then all join in. [[clip: cakewalk Stormy Weather 2:40](#)]

We can note several things here: the persistence of Hollywood and white culture stereotypes in the minstrel show aspects at the start, especially the women's dance chorus with blackface rag doll aspects to their costumes; but we can also note that everyone does join in and in terms of narrative development, the dance shows the community endorsement of the heterosexual couple. In contrast to many other falling-in-love musical dance numbers in Hollywood which isolate the dancers from society, here the Harlem community is a backdrop which allows the pair to form (as a couple) and perform (as entertainers).

Nostalgically recreating part of Black culture in Harlem after WW1, *Stormy Weather* had a rather obvious ideological function: it endorses Black participation in the war effort in 1943, as in 1919. This is no small thing, for we now know that some African American leaders privately made it very clear to the Roosevelt administration that they would support the war effort and accept the indignity of a Jim Crow armed forces only on the expectation of military integration and expanded rights and opportunities after the war. And while, as viewers today we can easily critique certain aspects of this sequence as perpetuating Hollywood racism, we shouldn't ignore those aspects of the representation which refer to and endorse traditions of the African American community. For the white audience during World War II the cakewalk sequence provided an entertaining glimpse at exotic Others. For the African American audience, the sequence provided a reminder of a cultural heritage and an enactment of social ties and the presentation of heterosexual romance validated within a subcultural community. It also validated as central characters Bill Robinson, best known up to that point in Hollywood films as the friendly and Uncle Tomish dance partner in several Shirley Temple films, and Lena Horne as talented and romantically attractive.

Of course the original slave plantation cakewalk didn't change the fact of slavery, and of course it didn't overthrow it, but it did grant a group solidarity, a humor and bonding in the face of adversity and oppression, and this is no small thing. Such social bonding is the fertile ground of resistance. There is a tendency to dismiss such everyday forms of resistance to oppression. But to do so loses sight of the importance of small forms, the familiar expressions of consciousness. For example, feminist historians remind us that domestic space is a necessary precondition to events in public space. Domestic space provides the backstage for the public dramas.

### Voguing

I want to develop another example of cultural appropriation/reappropriation by presenting two cases of voguing. The success of Jennie Livingston's documentary film, *Paris Is Burning* (1991), on Black and Puerto Rican gay drag balls in New York City, assures that the background is widely known. Voguing began as a vernacular dance, with moves very similar to break dancing, around the late 60s within the context of black gay male culture in Harlem drag balls. It's a challenge dance, and as it evolved it took its name from the quotation of posing from fashion magazines, like Vogue, and runway fashion presentation. Like the cakewalk, vogue was danced in costume duplicating the dominant culture: typically in currently fashionable female clothing, but including categories for military uniforms, male business executives, etc. ([clip: Everybody Dance Now 4:10](#))

I think the points I was making earlier about appropriation are clear here: in the process of forging their own culture and identity, the femme and butch transvestites and transsexuals of this community take from the dominant. On the one hand, taking from the Other is something that males have always done in using drag. Here it is complicated again by having most of the imitation of the dominant wealthy white heterosexual world,

blatantly inaccessible to the ball community. And significantly, there is an edge to this imitation, a containment and yet an expression of anger, even in the voguers stated desires to be rich, famous, and pass as conventional. On the other hand, it is easy to be suspicious of an activity which seems to celebrating values which are the opposite of these people's actual lives: Black and Puerto Rican, and homosexual, the working poor who sometimes or often live by street hustling, who sometimes steal to get designer label fashions for the balls.

This is a system built of contradictions, so if we're going to understand it, we will have to come to terms with all of them: those of race, those of gender, those of class. Black gay writer Essex Hemphill in an analysis of *Paris Is Burning*, marked some of his own reservations. Quoting from another Black gay intellectual, Joseph Beams, he argued that: "style is an attitude" and that it is essentially reactive and defensive. As Beams put it:

The gay life is about affectation, but style is not imagemaking. Style, at best, is an attitude, a reaction to oppression, a way of being perceived as less oppressed, a way of feeling attractive when we are deemed unattractive. (Hemphill 111)

Hemphill recognizes that the Harlem balls involved the mocking and playing out the fashion show, and played with the matter of appearance-- or "realness"--since the contestants are evaluated highest when the trained as well as untutored eye cannot tell the difference between the illusion and the actuality. And yet Hemphill is also distinctly critical of a system which replicates, "the submissive and passive female identity constructed to oppress women vertically and horizontally. 'Femme Realness' condones the very things feminists have condemned and criticized about patriarchally constructed female identity." (Hemphill, 120). Hemphill critiques a resistance that is founded on materialistic, consumer, white terms. But he also recognizes that:

The erasure or silencing of identity through the use of illusion might be considered simply an act of entertainment in the context of the balls if it weren't such a willful act of survival and affirmation exercised in a state of increasing desperation. The yearning festering behind the illusions is a yearning for a full equality and a common privilege that the United States has yet to deliver... (121)

If we accept this analysis as valid for its base community, then how do we move on to the appropriation of voguing by commercial mass culture? Madonna's *Vogue* music video provides a perfect example. [\[clip: Madonna, Vogue, 5.00\]](#)

In what follows here, I am not primarily concerned with analyzing Madonna, who in any case, rest securely as one of the central commonplaces of cultural studies. I will simply note the obvious: Madonna's star image is postmodern; she is a clever businesswoman who understands the circulation of star images and celebrity; she knows how to press people's buttons to maintain her career. It's easy enough to mark the ways that her *Vogue*

video abstracts a surface and style from Harlem ball culture. She has nothing to say back to the people from whom she appropriated (significantly, that appropriation removes the anger that suffuses the original), but in an important way she has much to say to the white middle class suburbs she herself came from. Ten years into the Reagan-Bush era, *Express Yourself* is an anthem for women's empowerment, *Vogue* (the video) lavishly expresses the physical beauty of African American men, *Justify My Love* (the video) celebrates polymorphous perversity in almost every adolescent's home: certainly some things that conventional politics wasn't able to do.

But this isn't enough for critics like Budd, Entman, and Steinman:

...we should not make too much of the significance of alternative readings. Women who find Madonna's image the sexual independence they admire may do so without actually altering their personal relationships with men, let alone joining feminist organizations. They may admire Madonna and still believe that patriarchal sex roles are natural, resolving internal conflicts in favor of the external forces they confront. If this were not so, we should see one subversive belief becoming linked to others, leading to visible confrontations with power, especially when subversive readings are as widely available as they are in the realm of feminism. (178)

But would these three critics really be happy with art that had the power to convert people to a political cause? This would be Goebbels' dream come true, or even better: instead of the hours it takes to view *Triumph of the Will*, a five minute music video recruits the unpoliticized to the cause. The issue is a rather old one in Western aesthetics, one that goes back to Plato banishing the poets from his Republic.

A far more pertinent critique of Madonna and *Vogue* centers on matters of racial representation. Hemphill notes that the video erases the source of voguing in Harlem drag ball culture, and he observes, "...the litany of names she calls in the song as representative of style and attitude deliberately excludes Blacks and Puerto Ricans...names like Josephine Baker, Dorothy Dandridge, and Celia Cruz are conspicuously absent from her list of the beautiful ones." (114) Hemphill is right about this selective appropriation, and yet while correctly getting the words of the music video, he completely misses a far more powerful point in the video, which is the immensely beautiful and physically expressive African American men who are lovingly presented and endorsed by the camera work, who dance with an astonishing skill. Like many literary and verbal culture intellectuals, on a verbal level Hemphill is correct, but on a visual and sensual level he missed the point. Some other critics have done better. In a rather searing discussion, African American critic bell hooks raised the rhetorical question, "Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?" and pursued the topic further in a study of Madonna's book, *Sex* (hooks, 1993). In considering the star, hooks manages to grasp both the appeal of Madonna's image of female empowerment, and the limits of her racial imagination which transgresses some boundaries only to endlessly return to validating her own whiteness.

I am interested in hooks' discussion because it belongs to evolving critical and theoretical analyses within cultural studies that take voguing, *Paris Is Burning*, Madonna's *Vogue* and other opportunities to discuss gender, race, and class together, all at once, as interrelated, and begin to lay out new ways of thinking that hopefully will help us move beyond the impasse seen in the debate I described at the start of this paper. In other words, I don't think we're definitely beyond that debate, but I am encouraged by some newer tendencies which move on from its terms. For example, in "Elements of Vogue," Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti argue against an essentializing discourse on vogue that interprets it as a hybrid and instead put forward the critical term *syncretism* which they interpret as always maintaining the fluidity and changeable nature of the phenomenon being studied. Similarly, Kobena Mercer's recent book of essays, *Welcome to the Jungle*, shows an interesting evolution in his thought on racial fetishization in visual arts starting with his earlier strong negative evaluation of Robert Mapplethorpe's photography worked out with a reconsideration after the conservative attack on Mapplethorpe's work. In a somewhat different but related critical discussion of gender representation, positions have also evolved. Some extreme claims were made for "performing gender" in the recent past, such as Marjorie Garber's book length assertion that "transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself." (17) Judith Butler answers this claim and others in *Bodies That Matter* with a discussion of *Paris Is Burning*.

...There is both a sense of defeat and a sense of insurrection to be had from the drag pageantry in *Paris Is Burning*, that the drag which is after all framed for us, filmed for us, is one which both appropriates and subverts racist, misogynist, and homophobic norms of oppression. How are we to account for this ambivalence? This is not first an appropriation and then a subversion. Sometimes it is both at once, sometimes it remains caught in an irresolvable tension, and sometimes a fatally unsubversive appropriation takes place. (128)

What then is the relation of subcultures to appropriation and reappropriation? At the risk of repeating the error of circular definition that Meaghan Morris describes, I think we must more fully consider the contradictions of both cultural texts and responses. The situation we study is one of flux and change. It can only be understood as one of context and relation. It is one that must include analysis of contingent factors. This can sound like academic cheerleading: "Tougher analysis! More complexity! More contradiction!" But the goal is to bring our theorizing closer to the complexity of actuality and to enact that theory, to embody it, to test it, in actual social practice.

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## More on cultural consecration and legitimization

Li asked a question in the seminar on Monday which I said I would have to go back to B's writing to answer more definitively. The question was about who or what determines consecration and the vehicles/agents of it.

Interestingly enough, in *Distinction* there is actually not an index item for "consecration". [NB. this is a rough guide way of considering the matter--but not authoritative since the translator or indexer may have made decisions that obscure the matter.] In *The Field of Cultural Production* the index lists numerous references to consecration, as well as related terms. *The Rules of Art* has fewer index entries, but the concept is amply represented.

On p. 26 of *Distinction*, B talks about legitimacy and how it is established. Largely, he indicates this is through education (both formal, schooling, and informally by things being put in the position of being recognizable as legitimate). He also indicates that we recognize in the objects, something already known. (He then uses the example of gaining cinema educational capital vs. cinema-going. (this section is worth re-reading)).

An example to think about here would be the board game of Trivial Pursuit, which itself resembles some TV game shows like *Jeopardy* or *Wheel of Fortune*, which call for specific recall of otherwise transient or insignificant information. (Albert Einstein, asked about how he kept so much knowledge in his head, once remarked that he only tried to remember things that he couldn't look up in a book--I suppose today he'd say things he couldn't google.) On the other hand, clearly there is some kind of pleasure (which I've never experienced directly) in the propensity for baseball fans to accumulate vast statistical knowledge. But extensive knowledge about pop culture (who played what role in old TV shows, for example) has relatively little other use than for playing such games, unless you are a TV historian.

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, 120-125. B. discusses the field of restricted production as involving those institutions that produce cultural Thus some institutions conserve culture (museums, cinematheques, etc.) while others ensure cultural reproduction through education: "...the reproduction of agents imbued with the categories of action, expression, conception, imagination, perception, specific to the 'cultivated disposition'." (p. 121)[see also the key footnote here]

Li's particular concern is the situation of Sixth Generation directors and Fifth Generation directors. In *Rules*, p. 224, B makes the important point that while there is an attempt to create a monopoly of consecration, in point of fact when the basic category is in dispute, this is evidence that the struggle over definitions is itself part of the reality the investigator is examining.

In terms of his analysis in *Rules*, there is an actual historical development of new social categories and strata in 19C France which creates "writers." That is, the net effect of the change from feudalism to capitalism, the change from a royal government to a form of

representative democracy, the change from a rural to urban base, the expansion of productive forces through industrialization, etc (the combination of things we can call “modernity”), the increase in literacy, the availability of inexpensive newspapers, etc. creates “readers” but also helps creates people who can make a living as “writers”—thus journalists in particular, but also dramatists, song writers, and so forth come into existence in a previously unknown way. We might remember the spectacularly successful 19c Parisian dramatist Eugène Scribe, who created the “well made play” formula (which is, not so incidentally, the basis of the 20C classical narrative cinema screenplay), would actually sketch out a treatment, and then turn it over to a cadre of assistants who actually wrote the play, and then brought it back for his final edit. Such industrial production on the stage, was perfectly set up for transfer to film. Thus the standard handbooks of screenwriting simply continue this highly formulaic practice.

But B also reminds us that the very contention about what is consecrated and not, about the category of who is an artist or writer and who isn’t, is part of what we study in the historical field. Thus, the struggle about the boundaries of the group and conditions of membership is by no means abstract: the reality of all cultural production, and the very idea of the writer, may find themselves radically transformed by the sole fact of an enlargement of the ensemble of people who have their say on literary things.” [Rules, 224]

Certainly we witnessed this in the contestation over the literary canon when African American, Latino, Native American, feminist, queer, and other critics insisted on reconsidering the canon. And the intensity of the resistance to expanding the field shows as well what is at stake in terms of the field of power and politics. (In the US in the 80s and early 90s, much of this was wrapped in the extremely conservative activities of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and in particular the personality of its head, Lynne Cheney [today the wife of the Vice President]. Similarly, the issue of who is a consecrated filmmaker (at the heart of Meredith’s analysis) itself goes through forms of contestation, both within the auteur theory rankings, or the current redefinition of the field represented by Jeff Sconce’s work on paracinema, the extremely low culture exploitation cinema.

The question Li is investigating is especially interesting because both the Fifth Generation and the Sixth Generation have been consecrated in large part because of reception abroad. And because as an industrial art, cinema requires very large amounts of capital. While “anyone” can write poetry, and even get it published at least in small circulation, hardly any one could actually self-finance a professional quality feature length film production. Thus the state, in China, can control economic resources as well as have censorship control over distribution and exhibition.

Further complication in France. The state directly intervenes in consecrating culture (e.g., the French Academy, an institution with no parallel in the US, which is empowered by the state to set all kinds of standards in areas of art, language usage, etc.). In fact the US is one of the few nations to not have a ministry of culture. In *Field*, p. 122 B points out that once established as the arbiter of matters cultural, the Academy at key moments

needed to declare some cultural producers out-of-bounds, heretics who would not be granted consecrated status. This very act then established the outcasts as important. Much the same phenomenon can be seen in, for example, the controversy around Robert Mapplethorpe's work. Criticized in Congress and elsewhere for an exhibition at the Corcoran which involved some federal funds, Mapplethorpe's work suddenly attained a national celebrity. His actual reputation to that point in fine art photography circles was as a fairly mediocre and often middlebrow talent following in a fairly derivative pattern (pale imitations of Edward Weston) with occasional provocations in terms of subject matter (images of SM subjects, hunky Black men and their penises, interracial embraces, etc. presented in a stylized conventionally "beautiful" way). Once denounced, many in the art world felt compelled to come to his defense, thus upping his reputation.

Thus controversy itself becomes a badge of honor and turns into cultural capital in the provocative avant garde. (This is a rather long-standing practice in some areas: e.g., in France the stage premiere of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* in the 1830s created a riot among warring factions of supporters and denigrators; subsequent avant gardists have sought similar reactions.)

Also pertinent: Fowler, Bridget. *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations*. London: Sage, 1997. Chapter 4, "The Historical Genesis of Bourdieu's Cultural Theory," pp.85-102. (particularly the section on consecration outside of France)

Cultural Studies--a preliminary institutional definition  
(definition for a School of Speech Committee on Cultural Studies)

Chuck Kleinhans

In the broad sense, Cultural Studies is a multi-disciplinary field which uses a contemporary definition of culture drawing on the sociological-anthropological sense of culture as human social interaction and its material/technological objects and processes. It also draws on traditional humanities studies of culture in the sense of art. Thus we can recognize its presence and antecedents in social and cultural history, literature and visual arts, performing arts, cultural anthropology, qualitative and ethnographic sociology--what Europeans tend to call "the human sciences." It has also had a significant presence in journalism--both thoughtful reportage and critical reviewing and analysis in the public sphere.

Because it has most often been applied to modern and contemporary societies, Cultural Studies has been especially linked to the study of representation and the media, and as a cross-disciplinary mode of inquiry it has been useful to areas such as American Studies, Communication Studies, African-American Studies, Women's Studies, etc. Because it has been open to new and emerging developments and has attracted younger researchers, it has been especially useful to examining cultural aspects of new social-political subcultures and movements such as gay/lesbian/queer activism, youth cultures, racial-ethnic groups, etc. It has also been useful to journalism and business schools especially in areas of advertising and marketing.

In a narrow sense, Cultural Studies has often been construed as the history of a specific intellectual development stemming from one institution--the Birmingham Center. In this line of development, it coalesces out of the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson and is further developed at Birmingham by Stuart Hall and then by his students as they move to Australia, Canada, the U.S., and so on. In this more restricted sense, it has been embattled and often politicized in relation to different fields and disciplines. For example, in communications and media studies it is often rejected by (generally politically conservative to liberal) traditional quantitative/functionalism/administrative researchers as well as (politically liberal to radical) political economists. Similarly it is often stigmatized by traditionalist humanities scholars for crossing beyond the canon and formal procedures.

Cultural Studies has been institutionalized in peculiar ways--largely through loose affiliations of faculties than departments and programs, more through shared research areas than organized or interdependent research projects, more though individual than group work. Thus its presence has been most notable in some conferences, some periodicals (e.g. *Cultural Studies*, *Social Text*, etc.) and some university press series (Routledge, Duke, Minnesota, etc.) Almost all practitioners

would admit to the existence of a certain amount of dubious work done in the area (a characteristic of all emerging areas), but as research agendas develop and investigators are more seasoned, it is clear that to the extent that the immediate and sometimes ephemeral social processes and cultural objects examined in Cultural Studies are subjected to a broader contextual framework of historical, institutional, economic, and political analysis, Cultural Studies provides a powerful direction for analysis.

## Documentary as construction

versions of reality--always ↗ interpreting ↗

alter setting slightly to suggest things or compose

put in plants, rugs, posters, books, toys

put in children playing, tools of craft

lamps on or off

show grimness, innocence, profundity

camera angle

foreground, background

sound effects, louder sound in editing, music, tones

shadows, no fill, harsh light, romantic backlight

people lounging around lazily or purposeful

visual interest

with talent

keep down tension

natural setting

no dark glasses

two people or group talking animatedly

group sitting close together

'eavesdropping' ↗

walking or standing, no gravel crunch

many cutaways, of what they are talking about, for ex.

people passing by, in and out

decide how much to cover in advance--get summary on tape at once

establish central visual theme

eyeline match

walking out of room is good transition

use ECU

shift locations, move camera, change angle

nod shots-- both of interviewer and talent, CU and over the shoulder. Not with mouth moving.

CUTAWAYS, CUTAWAYS, CUTAWAYS--film them at length and in great variety, and in

## close up

interviews

voice test for levels

do not overrehearse, can rehearse questions and blocking

why talk to this person

nod, do not interrupt interesting replies, listen intently

avoid verbal--"uh uh"

eye contact

take breaks, build confidence, be in charge, set tone for event

interviewer with fact sheet on card

ask simple short questions, unless it ↗ s your story, too

set final style--will we, in final tape, see interviewer, hear questions, see crew and mike?

silent cues among crew agreed on

no yes/no questions

## Documentary ethics

speak at length

not alter main stance

self-presentation

good-faith contract, including forms of veto power

strategies for and problems with anonymity

interesting but tricky to depict person under stress

person doing work or craft

need to tell a stranger

intimacy, know someone well

vs taping family--staying outside the process via art

vs taping lover, nude child, illegal matters

## styles

narration in voice over  
scripted, control  
reductive, typage, selected images as illustration  
boring, lacks authentic feel, authoritative(often male)  
when good, like an essay, know and trust "author"  
    Bronowski, ASCENT OF MAN  
    Mazruri, THE AFRICANS  
    Joseph Campbell and Coppola on Myth

cinema verite  
    tell quality of relation with crew--love for subject filmed  
        sense of intimacy  
        time to get to know someone  
        interaction with camera people implied  
environments  
    if you know them well, know story behind the locale--the chair's history, what happens  
at that corner or outside that pizza parlor, the personality difference between the children in a family  
    poverty opens up into a textured environment  
uniqueness of individual  
    accents and forms of expression  
    bodytypes  
    "small" person's story or behind the scenes of important person  
    texture of daily life, of moment

talking heads plus cutaways  
    people are authorities on own situation  
    common social and political wisdom  
    filmmaker omits racism, sexism of people who are film's heroes  
    emphasize unpleasant aspects of someone--ethics?? political reasons for that??

07:34:00

← Experimental Video

← The artworld and the development of the field

←

←

← This is a preliminary survey of the experimental video artworld which stresses its historical development.

←

← What is experimental, avant garde?

! One strong line of relationship is with the world of experimental film, which has a longer history but many of the same characteristics.

- However there is a long standing difference, even antagonism in many cases between the Two areas.
- For summary, see CK in JC online

! Some differences in terms

- Avant garde

- Often meant to refer to a specific art movement of the early 20C, peaking in the 1920s and seen as over, expended (Peter Burger)
- But also a polemical position, art which is in advance of the mainstream or conventionally accepted
- (for me) a useful term that indicates a relation to the larger artworld

- Experimental--implies something new, something different, something tentative

- Actual source, Zola (experimental novel, experimental theatre)
- And is thus often rejected as a term by makers who claim they are not being "experimental or tentative"
- But useful for implication that it is open ended, willing to change, etc.

←

← The actual start of video, television

! New industrial technology (late 20s, early 30s)

- ! Not really developed into a broadcast medium until post war USA, c. 1947
  - Since the field was unformed, there is a lot of “primitive” work, and the conventions or expectations are not yet in place.
  - There is a lot of room for innovation, unexpected things, idiosyncratic forms
    - Even within commercial parameters, innovation and experimentation
      - Most famously, Ernie Kovacs
      - But also Soupy Sales, many others.
  - Some of this is underrecognized today, but many forms were taken over from existing broadcast radio--early TV was in many ways illustrated radio
    - It often remains dominated by the soundtrack
      - This is in distinct contrast to film, which not only historically but often aesthetically, develops as a visual form with sound added as a creative element only later.
- ! So, one line of development is in terms of outliers in the history of television, but also in various independent and renegade forms and institutions.
- ! Understand as well, that television newsgathering technology was solidly film based until the late 1970s. This created a huge infrastructure for 16mm film which made it especially viable as a technology for artists working on low(er) budgets. That began to change in the later 70s with the Silver Crisis (get details) and the concomitant change to “portable” broadcast-quality video technology.
  - However there was some entry for noncommercial, “amateur” television production due to municipal contractual arrangements, especially as developed in cable contracts

- There was a political struggle in many of the later communities (esp. large cities such as Chicago) to get cable during the 80s in which local activists managed to get public access channels, some commitments to training, some subsidy, etc. This created an alternative space (and look) for SOME parts of the spectrum.
- ! Another line of development comes in terms of the PoRTAPAK and independent video production.
  - This was regarded as “not broadcast quality” by broadcast television engineers/gatekeepers
  - But that rejection was also an inspiration
    - Created a community of people working outside of the existing dominant video (TV) system who by and large had no aspiration to enter the dominant arena
    - Using the same simple technology, these people were (not exclusively)
      - Members of the emerging bohemian artworld of the time, young artists, etc. who could not really afford to work in film (or at least on a regular basis) e.g., Fluxus, Nam June Paik
      - Established artists, even younger ones, who had developed in an existing field and who found video a useful way of documenting their performances, or of pushing the boundaries of their existing form through technology
        - ! Especially performance artists
          - Linda Montano (stage performance)
          - Laurie Anderson (music)
          - Others in performance, standup comedy, dance, etc.
        - ! Activists, who had something to document, say, explain, and who saw video as a way of broadly disseminating their concerns
          - Anti-Vietnam war
          - General counter culture rebellion
          - Student movement

- Feminist movement
- Gay movement,
- Special cases\*\*\*:
  - Civil rights movement evolving into Black Power movement
  - Latino movement (esp. Chicano)
  - Asian American
  - Native American
  - \*\*\*in many cases, the most experienced media producers in these areas had traditional skills and (some) access, esp. to film and broadcast television and younger people had (some) access to more traditional training.
- The fullest flowering of the activist trend was in terms of AIDS activism in the 1980s and early 90s. (Boyle; Gomez)
- While predominantly oriented to documentary forms, these trends also developed along the lines of the video essay, the personal/diary/autobiographical form, etc.

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## Field of cultural production

Define the field

In what ways is it like or different from other concepts used in cultural analysis

Artistic and cultural productions cannot be attributed simply to the creativity of the maker

Nor to the historical moment

But must be considered at least in part, or as well in terms of the relations within a field, its structure and its historical origins. The field mediates those elements within it.

IN terms of the field of avant garde film and video:

First defining the field

a. in relation to the rise of a modernist avant garde (historical project) in the various arts but film examples don't really appear until the 1920s, and by and large by artists who take up film after already working in other media.

Examples

France

US

Germany

Basic analysis

Relation to specific art movements (reels)

Relation to a short lived "avant garde" (burger)

Relation to a longer patterned "moment of cubism"

Characteristics of artistic modernism:

Alternative analysis--relation of position (Unseen Cinema)

The field changes in the 1930s

Major historical events--displacement, exile,

End of WW2

US--Deren, et al Menken, Gryphon,

Development of a self conscious avant garde

Art in Cinema (museum)

Cinema 16 special screenings--an adjunct to the mainstream)

Underground cinema, New American Cinema

Canyon cinema

--includes narrative, documentary, artistic

growth of cinema clubs, special ad hoc screenings,

attempts to cross over, commercial

what is the purpose? underground as counter culture

gay, lesbian, drug and music, anti war, student movement, civil rights, foreign art film etc.

(the development of an audience which wants, seeks out, will support, this kind of production) and which gathers in a theatrical space to participate.

Development of a critical apparatus

Development of a system of distribution and exhibition

Of fundingg NEA, AFI, etc (build on GGuggenheim, Rockefeller, etc

Teaching positions, and related activities

Industrial base: 16mm film (for other purposes; 60s newsfilm)

Film in design schools, art schools, universities and liberal arts colleges, etc. trade schools.

Contrast--development of video art: by artists, often sculptors and performance artists

Aware of spatial and durational nature of the art they work in. often take advantage of videos portability and accessibility to repeated screening in specific locations--people drop in rather than attend

Or broadcast or special theatrical event.

70s--porn above ground

women's, gay and lesbian, other festival circuit

LA Rebellion

Ideas of narrowcasting

Creation of special indie conditions---60s, 70s. alternative and marginal circuits

Big lessons--it changes over time

Economics,

Individuals and types of individuals

Commercial potential

How can you make a living?

Not a unique or even rare object

--sell it?

--or rent it?

--sell your reputation

day job vs. art job

relation to adjacent worlds: advertising, broadcasting, etc. what do you want to do with it?

70s/80s video--possibility of unique ownership

art for artists, or at least art world people.....need to be knowledgeable to follow it

Godard and others--the impact of film practice on film theory  
Godard as Brechtian; as postmodernist

Many use the model of scientific investigation  
--that theory proceeds practice  
medicine, engineering, etc.

(this of course is flattering to theorists)

However, in the human sciences it is different

practice, in this case the art of film as developed by filmmakers,  
almost always precedes film theory

Film theory is a relentless attempt to catch up to film practice

exception--the extreme distortion produced in academic film studies in the 70s-80s by a specific group who want to monopolize the discussion for reasons of professional self promotion (example of CPAs and taxes) who attempt to redefine film theory as a certain kind of discourse

[refer to institutional analysis in 1st quarter]

Just as Italian neo-realism was the "right" movement for Bazinian theory [the current canon], the film movements of the 60s were the basis for the film theories of the post 68 period.

although not uniformly--the changing fortunes of Bergman  
the important examples of Antonioni, Rossellini

Godard becomes the most crystallized version of 60s concerns in film

his extreme self consciousness of film  
of himself and his own ideas and personality (public persona as self promo)

Godard as Swiss intellectual

the romanticism of Rousseau  
the rationalism of Voltaire

The key films

Breathless  
Vivre Sa Vie  
Pierrot Le Fou  
Alphaville  
Masculin-Feminine (in our collection)

Weekend as Godard's critique of modern civilization

1966  
the idea of mixing drastically different styles, forms  
assaulting conventional expectations (esp. bourgeois good taste)  
"absurdist"  
political, in a certain way  
moralistic (always in Godard)

The concept of classical Hollywood cinema  
read Bordwell essay from this perspective

The idea of a Brechtian cinema, influence of BB

[see Wollen essay on Wind from the East as counter-cinema]

[NB. The JC definition of counter-cinema is much broader than the dominant notion in film theory]

The problem of a political reading of Brecht vs. a strictly formalist reading

example of Brian Henderson essay (in M&M 1, H's Critique)

"Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style"

claims that the camera movements in themselves are ideological (or in this case anti-bourgeois ideology)

Robin Wood's reply: but I end up enjoying it, appreciating it as its own aesthetic choice/device

test this for yourself when we see the film

[note too, that this argument is essentially the same as (ie working in the same set of presuppositions as)

Bazin's argument that style creates meaning, and Henderson's argument is not all that much different than Bazin's in explicating the sequence shot in Le crime de M. Lange.

An apparent puzzle. The resolution: The concept of "Brechtian" must be understood as fundamentally political, and not

therefore reducible to form alone. The notion of a strictly formal attack on bourgeois ideology is the dream of petty bourgeois intellectuals who would like a painless revolution that only takes place in people's heads, that could be accomplished in form alone. In actual point of fact, Brechtian has to be understood with the following minimal concerns:

- a. a radical content
- b. an innovative form that resists "easy" or "comfortable" assimilation  
[B's attack on "culinary" or "Aristotelean" theatre]
- c. an historical moment, a political context
- d. and an audience, ready, willing, and able to take action

BB--good theatre divides its audience

Godard as postmodernist

postmodernism

being after modernism

1. vs. eclecticism, for the clean, machine age, Bauhaus,

form follows function

2. novelty and originality, always avant garde

3. reject decoration, ornament; for geometric, clear

4. vs. national, regional, vernacular, for the international

and cosmopolitan

5. art of the future--would affect society (but

fundamentally elitist--intellectuals will decide)

example: Le Courbusier housing blocks

postmod characteristics:

1. plurality of styles, hybrid, eclecticism

2. recycling of styles, "retro style"; quotations, collage, parody, pastiche

3. ornament and decoration

4. mix high and low culture, assumes various responses

from general public and those "in the know"

[a kind of irony] but makes work accessible to both

5. concern with meaning, statement (art can

communicate, this should be a concern of the artist)

6. "intertextuality" constant reference to the world of art, of media itself, as an artificial but real

part of existence. Art and discourse structure the way we understand the world of "the Real". Out there is in here.

## The Situation of Film Theory in 1968

This is an example of intellectual history in which we study not only ideas, but also the individuals and institutions that bring them into being and change along with them.

**trends**--a large number of people are interested in the same area, but are not in perfect agreement with each other (eg. psychoanalysis); this allows for productive difference (hopefully); antagonistic difference (possibly).

[imp. aside: remember too that people are also involved with this in terms of careers, competitiveness, etc.]

**Individuals:** it takes people for the production of ideas, articles, films, and for the interaction of this. Personal histories often intervene as well (not that that explains everything, and not that I want to just gossip about my colleagues in the field, but it needs to be understood by anyone who is going to enter the field, that it's not an area of pure disinterested scholarship (if there is such a thing)).

**Institutions:** ideas and individuals can't exist without institutions, even informal ones. Things like film clubs, magazines, conferences, and graduate programs, are the base on which other things develop, come into being and change. Example of the Feminar and Film Reader.

There is also a personal history for individuals; theorists themselves change and develop their theoretical perspective and tools and work over time. Thus, the importance of Godard for many varying individuals can be interpreted as a "trend"--almost all the significant film theorists who form a generation of the late 60s and early 70s write about Godard. (film practice leads film theory, in general.)

### 1968: metaphor of the cross section

cross section of the upper arm of human does not indicate that the arm ends in a hand; this is the limit of such a tool for understanding, history and historical analysis lets us conclude something,

In film criticism: **dominance of "taste"**

*Sight and Sound*, weekly and monthly reviewers (before Shalit, Siskel & Ebert, *Entertainment Tonight*, etc.)

- a. validation of "quality" European film
- b. some validation of "serious" (e.g. morally serious content) H'wood. Thus despite their antagonistic differences, Kael and Sarris are united in validating much of Hollywood, "movies" over "film"
- c. the historical tradition (but, for ex., Eisenstein, not Vertov).

In film theory, dominance of a realist aesthetic  
Bazin--vs. Eisenstein, vs. expressionism  
Kracauer (prob. best known film th. book in Eng. at time)--  
same, with a different inflection  
both, for realist tradition, for Italian neo-realism.

What was available? what was in distribution? (US)  
art house circuit: Bergman, some of the New Wave, some verite doc'y, the Italians (La Dolce Vita, 8 1/2, Blow Up), some Japanese, Brit. slick realists  
commercial: some changes in breakdown of studio system:  
e.g. Bonnie and Clyde, Easy Rider, a more marked authorship  
film societies: the European tradition and major H'wood ; AudioBrandon as the norm, New Yorker and Grove as new, upstart.  
U.S. avant garde: just getting started as a national phenomenon.  
college courses: virtually none; "appreciation" of "classics" at best.

The full flowering of authorship  
Sarris: *American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-68*  
Authorship makes a case for taking H'wood seriously.  
Decisively challenges notion of "taste."  
"Not a theory" (Sarris).  
Allows for the analysis of general patterns;  
still has investment in a notion of "quality";  
validates formal and stylistic analysis (but hides its own ideological prejudices at the same time; eg. validates Hawks and Hitchcock, but studiously avoids noticing any misogyny in them).

The rapid development of authorship (and genre, which allows for a more social reading of H'wood) has an institutional basis as well:  
the existence of movies on tv.  
the existence of re-run houses in certain urban areas  
the low cost section of 16mm dist. catalogues

An intellectual basis as well: the acceptance by a generation of young college educated people of movies as a valid art form; a subversion of the norms of the university itself. Movie going as an important cultural activity, as well as entertainment and escape. Eg, the Orson Welles in Cambridge MA and the exam period Bogart retro. (This was the first arrival of the tv generation on the campus; people who accepted moving sound / image material as an equal, if not yet dominant medium in relation to print.)

[aside on my own experience 64-66, 2-3 H'wood movies a day in the Navy; what you learn from extended and repeated immersion in H'wood product.]

general idea: film theory is decisively influenced by a shifting canon. (1) evaluation changes (2) new films become available (or old ones become re-available).

### Also in 1968.

- Tet Offensive; turning point in public opinion about the VN war; shows VC can strike anywhere at will; not decimated.
- Johnson withdraws from election; cannot speak publicly without drawing a protest demo; in last 18 months of term only visits military installations.
  - third long hot summer of ghetto uprisings
  - Expanded student movement; Columbia takeover (major SDS action)/NYC as news and print journalism center, effect in coverage
    - assassination of Martin Luther King as he is more involved in labor issues and after explicit anti-imperialist speaking; urban rebellions after his death.
    - assassination of Robert Kennedy, leading liberal contender for Democrats
    - growth and failure of the Gene McCarthy movement (left-liberal wing of Democratic Party.)
  - Chicago Democratic Convention, nominates Humphrey while police riot attack demonstrators on tv.
  - Election of Richard Nixon. (represents Republican middle and corporate liberal wing.)
  - Paris, May-June. Student-worker strike threatens DeGaulle govt; military on alert; CP breaks militancy, Maoists emerge.

It was hard to see how authorship addressed these matters.

The new Godard films:

- 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her (67), NY Film Festival, Oct 68.
- La Chinoise (67), US 68
- Weekend (67) NY Film Festival, Sept. 68
- Le Gai Savoir (68),

after May-June begins intense period of militant films, collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin (Dziga Vertov Group)

Rise of the US Underground: Warhol, *Chelsea Girls*

The question then emerges: what would a radical political cinema be?

- In theatre: the explosion of Off-Off Broadway; first move into SoHo.
- In NYC sub bohemia: move into Lower East Side.
- Expansion of poetry and writing, dance (Judson Dance Workshop; Rainer, Schneeman, performance art)
- Overnight growth of underground newspapers
- expansion of counter-culture
- recreational drugs: marijuana, psychedelics
- Rock music, etc.

The creation of Newsreel, the New Left documentary film organization(s)  
John Hess, "Notes on U.S. Radical Film, 1967-80" (Jump Cut)  
revival of interest in 30s militant doc'y--Russell Campbell, Wm.  
Alexander)

To summarize: there was a rapid development of a broadly constituted radical film culture; media people, just as others were influenced by this. Many barriers seemed to be falling. Art and politics; lifestyle and beliefs; activism and media.

In this context, Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969/72):  
Eisenstein's aesthetics: E as political radical and aesthetic innovator,  
bridging modernism and popular culture.

Authorship (Ford/Hawks)

"Ford's work is much richer than that of Hawks and that  
this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the  
richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work  
that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubtedly  
auteur."

(aesthetic complexity highest value; basic modernist aesthetic position)  
[irony: attacked in Screen as auteurist]

Semiotics. Basic introduction. model/metaphor of language. for a more scientific analysis of aesthetic.

But also, an argument for a different history of cinema (every theory,  
sooner or later has to come up with a theory/model of origins)

"Cinema did not only develop technically out of the magic lantern, the Daguerreotype, the phenakistoscope and similar devices--its history of Realism--but also out of strip-cartoons, Wild West shows, automatia, pulp novels, barn-storming melodramas, magic--its history of the narrative and the marvellous. Lumiere and Melies are not like Cain and Abel; there is no need for one to eliminate the other. It is quite misleading to validate one dimension of the cinema unilaterally at the expense of all the others. There is no pure cinema, grounded on a single essence, hermetically sealed from contamination."

This explains the value of a director like Jean-Luc Godard, who is unafraid to mix Hollywood with Kant and Hegel, Eisensteinian montage with Rossellinian Realism, words with images, professional actors with historical people, Lumiere with Melies, the documentary with the iconographic. More than anybody else Godard has realized the fantastic possibilities of the cinema as a medium of communication and expression."

Conclusion of S&M: reform teaching, vs. overwhelming power of lit. in humanities curriculum. Appendix, 1, style; 2, pantheon.

[1972 version: drops that, defense of avant garde; two avant gardes: formal experimental, socialist/radical] Then becomes a filmmaker with Laura Mulvey.

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--that theory proceeds practice

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the romanticism of Rousseau  
the rationalism of Voltaire

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## A Check List for Film/Media Studies PhD Programs

Chuck Kleinhans

Draft version 1.2

My goal here is to give a broad survey of best practices in PhD programs in Media Studies, broadly construed. This list should be useful to prospective students in considering which programs to which they might apply, to matriculated students and current faculty in marking what practices and changes might be useful in improving their program, and for administrators in evaluating existing programs, planning new ones, and making funding decisions.

Since programs and institutions vary greatly in size, scope, resources, histories, and talents, there can be no “one size fits all” for all cases. And PhDs in media studies range through a wide variety of departments and programs: stand alone Cinema Studies, Mass Communications, Cultural Studies, language and literature departments, Theatre, Art and Art History, and so forth, as well as interdisciplinary areas such as Gender Studies, various area studies, etc. But it is possible to set clear and easily recognizable goals which may then be implemented locally in different ways.

For example, to say that PhD students should ideally receive professional development in classroom teaching is a fairly accepted goal. Reaching this goal may be through formal required classes and workshops offered in the department or by the graduate school, or through a campus “teaching center” which holds annual or regular instruction on teaching and/or visits by expert observers who can give effective feedback to the beginning teacher, as well as training sessions customized to a particular department (including for example, technical instruction on projecting film, or learning software used in instruction such as Blackboard, Photoshop, etc.). Of course working as a TA and being given well supervised opportunities for grading, presentations in class, and conducting discussion groups can be the most effective, useful, and specific development in working with a professor-mentor. The specifics of implementation are less important than the systematic development of the PhD student, and the ongoing opportunity for constructive feedback about teaching.

In many cases, peer mentoring works very well, with more experienced students helping less experienced ones. But in any case, I think the overall principle should be that mentoring and professional development is a corporate/community responsibility. While it is true that the grad student/advisor bond is special and unique, the process should not just be left to individual cases. At its worst, such a system leads to professors cherry picking students they will mentor and ignoring others who then are orphaned. While the special bond of dissertation director and student must be recognized, the group responsibility for giving all students access to information, advising, etc. must also be recognized and implemented. Also, the vagaries of academic life, with sabbaticals, leaves, personal matters, and (let’s be honest, we’ve all seen it) highly neurotic faculty

behavior from time to time, make exclusively one-on-one counseling and advising unadvisable.

I've recently been asked to review some proposals for new PhD programs, so some of these remarks are aimed at faculty who may be new to thinking about these matters as they implement their programs.

### **Program description**

- before applying, students should have available a comprehensive description of the program including anticipated program changes. This should include a realistic description of what courses are actually offered and how frequently (a list of the past two years offerings might be useful here) and the actual time to degree of students.
- the description should clearly mark milestones such as comprehensive exams, qualifying exams, dissertation prospectus approval, etc.
- the description should have a realistic discussion of financial support throughout the program: what is guaranteed, what is open for competition (and just how competitive that is), the kind and quality of TA/RA experience, etc. And at what point financial support runs out (especially crucial for international students who cannot seek employment in the US except at their school).
- during recruiting, prospective students should be able to meet with current students. It is often useful to present a typical budget for rental housing in the area, need for an auto, and other living expenses since these can vary depending on campus location.

### **New Student Orientation**

Introduction to the faculty and what they will teach this year; opportunity for individual office visits.

- social event or meal with new students and faculty
- orientation to library, media resources, etc.
- calendar of key deadlines for the year
- peer counseling with more experienced students in the program
- clearly articulated policies on key matters such as milestones for progress, leave, etc. (including parental/maternity leave, etc).

### **Professional Training**

- workshops should be given regularly to inform students of and prepare them for writing effective proposals for grants and fellowships, both internal and external. Effective training in obtaining external financial support not only adds luster to the student's record, it adds prestige to the program and frees up resources to help more students.
- training should be given in writing effective conference proposals and advice should be given about strategizing conference attendance.
- information about the various professional organizations, conferences, events should be readily available and published.
- At least modest support should be given to students to attend professional meetings, even if not giving a presentation. Student initiative and recognition should be rewarded.

- workshops in preparing effective conference presentations, and trial run sessions should be standard operating procedure. Good mentoring can quickly build a program's profile as students demonstrate their talent in other venues.
- For some kinds of research such as human subject interviews and ethnographic methods, additional student training is needed before the student can submit to Human Subject Review Boards or Institutional Review Boards. These procedures might be an integral part of the classroom and lab experience of social science based researchers, but unknown to humanities and arts scholars, and often a considerable negotiation is needed in the process. (At most research schools outside funding is not processed until IRB/HSRB approval is granted.)

### **Introduction to the field/to grad studies**

This seems to be covered in vastly different ways at different schools. At its most dismal, it can be just a visiting parade of the faculty talking about themselves—a kind of beauty pageant with the virtue of introducing people and the downside of little serious content or learning. At its best, it can be a fairly comprehensive and challenging mix of readings and practical projects that build knowledge (especially of the wide diversity of the field and adjacent areas of study) and provide experience with research tools, building a cohort, and giving a sensible introduction to matters such as conceiving a research trajectory, planning travel and fieldwork, building a teaching portfolio, etc.

One significant problem is that many programs admit students at vastly different levels of previous experience, ranging from someone who has never taken formal coursework in media studies to a student who had an undergrad major and completed an MA program in the field. A customized plan for different individuals may help eliminate redundant coursework.

### **Introduction to the school and the community.**

- Some students, especially international students from non-western cultures, can benefit from organized experiences of local culture. For example, Northwestern's office for international students offers a month long intro before fall classes that includes living with a US family, tours and events. This acclimates the student and has proven to be especially useful in preparing grads for TAing US undergrads.
- grad students should have a recognized spokesperson/advocate/representative to the faculty.

### **Milestones**

- informational meeting on the nature of the academic job market and how to prepare for it, year by year. From selection of study and exam areas, to preparing a c.v. and writing the job letter, preparing a teaching portfolio, etc. Annual, for all students
- workshop on writing for publication and how to get published. Nuts and bolts and also strategic planning (annual)
- workshop on conference presentation, and rehearsal (annual)
- symposium of current student work (usually related to PhD dissertation)

## **Training in Teaching**

- formal and practical training; supervision of TA experiences; feedback; opportunities to rotate through different classes; opportunities to lead discussions, grade papers, advise students in their projects, supervise lab work, and give lectures.

## Ideology notes 1.2

The main topic and core of emphasis in the new cultural theory is ideology.

The concept derives principally from Marxism.

But it is also significantly changed and developed by the influence of anthropological and sociological thought and by the influence of psychology, particularly Freud's psychoanalysis.

As it has actually developed, the concept has been used in so many contexts and in marshalling such different arguments in such different fields of discussion, that it sometimes clearly belongs within recognizably Marxist thought and at other times it is used in clearly non-Marxist or anti-Marxist positions.

My first concern here will be to establish its general sense within Marxist discussion, although I am also involved in a "revision" of the concept, an expansion of the term to take into account fuller knowledge of and later to explain its development in other contexts.

Tentative definition: a system of knowing

it is systematic;

it is socially created and maintained and has features which are regular and which can be described by abstraction.

it involves knowing; perception involving all the senses, cognition, and analysis or formulation directed toward individual understanding and (by implication) social action. Cognition is here understood as involving conscious and unconscious processes.

therefore we could say that ideology is a term for the social construction of consciousness: Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*

As it has developed, there is a very narrow and specific view of ideology which sees it as a very specific set of ideas such as a philosophy or a set of religious doctrines. There is considerable foundation in Marxism for this concept, stemming from M&E's *The German Ideology*, which essentially takes up such a position. This is also the way the term has been used in mainstream Western political/social analysis.

However the term can also be broadened out to be seen as a necessary structural condition of society: ideology as an essential part of how people are able to cohere as social beings. This also stems from Marx: in particular the first chapter of *Capital*, in which Marx discusses commodity fetishism, that is how in capitalist

society people do not understand certain relations as social relations but instead see them as relations between things.

Some basic assumptions on the way to defining ideology

1. Ideology is not simply a philosophy or a set of specific doctrines. though it may be partially represented systematically by a philosophy, religion, or secular doctrine.
2. Ideology is a system of representation evolved by a specific social group for classical Marxism this most often concerns class, defined in Marx's sense by the relation of a group of people to production (that is economic production; specifically in capitalist society the production of surplus value). in classical Marxism, ideology is often contrasted to "knowledge" (which is "scientific" or "true")
3. Ideology is a social phenomenon based on historical reality and the material processes of life.  
"based on" does not need to mean directly derived from but it does indicate a relationship which can be understood in general
4. Part of ideology is based on, related to, reality; at the same time ideology misrepresents that reality, often by omission.
5. Ideology is not static but always in-process, in change, and open to simultaneously holding opposites in a dynamic tension. (see discussion of dialectics)
6. Ideology does not present the true relation of people to their conditions of existence, but rather a changed one.  
the exact term or metaphor used is significant: false/imaginary/inverted/distorted relation. Each term has a different meaning and implies a somewhat different understanding.
7. Ideology operates on both a conscious and unconscious level. It also operates on a bodily and behavior level.
8. Bourgeois ideology is the dominant ideology of the period in which the bourgeoisie is the dominant class
  - capitalism is the economic system; imperialism is its global manifestation (modified by stages of capitalism; transnational capitalism as more powerful than individual nation-states)
  - industrial production is the typical organization of production
  - liberal democracy is the common form of political organization (modified with local changes) of advanced industrial nations (the state mediates class interests).
  - urbanization is a condition of production
9. Bourgeois ideology is not a totally dysfunctional way of thinking. It is not simply the result of an attempt to manipulate people's understanding or "public opinion" (although such manipulation goes on)  
manipulation theory--Herbert Schiller, Dallas Smythe, George Gerbner, Noam Chomsky, Edward Hermann, Robert McChesney

it is an expression of (part of) people's real lived situation--eg "possessive individualism" from the Reformation to the present  
but it allows no real understanding of the concept of mediations on history by groups. Who is "guilty" for---tendency is to blame everyone or a single figure, rather than see degrees of involvement, qualification, mediation, etc.

10. Bourgeois ideology is relatively systematic, but it contains (has within it) contradictions. It also contains (holds together) contradictions.

11. Ideology is not so much false (in the sense of being a deliberate lie) but is limited severely by conditions of which the subject is unaware.

12. In its functioning, ideology serves specific interests  
bourgeois ideology serves specific class interests but not always in the way (or by whom) it is propagated, but in its long range social function.

key aside:

Marxism is a philosophy of relations. The conditions of any process are part of what that process is. There are not independent and static factors but dynamic and related ones. Marxism assumes movement, process, interconnectedness, change. Marxism tries to study things in change, not in fixity. Essentially this is the concept of dialects. The core statement is in Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks.

Essential rephrasings are

Mao, *On Contradiction* (the most simple)

Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (quite sophisticated)

Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (massively complex)

Althusser, *For Marx*

Ollman, *Alienation; Dialectical Investigations*

Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

two fairly complex re-assessments of the concept

Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*

John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*

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As it has actually developed, the concept has been used in so many contexts and in marshalling such different arguments in such different fields of discussion, that it sometimes clearly belongs within recognizably Marxist thought and at other times it is used in clearly non-Marxist or anti-Marxist positions.

My first concern here will be to establish its general sense within Marxist discussion, although I am also involved in a "revision" of the concept, an expansion of the term to take into account fuller knowledge of and later to explain its development in other contexts.

Tentative definition: a system of knowing

it is systematic;

it is socially created and maintained and has features which are regular and which can be described by abstraction.

it involves knowing; perception involving all the senses, cognition, and analysis or formulation directed toward individual understanding and (by implication) social action. Cognition is here understood as involving conscious and unconscious processes.

therefore we could say that ideology is a term for the social construction of consciousness: Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*

As it has developed, there is a very narrow and specific view of ideology which sees it as a very specific set of ideas such as a philosophy or a set of religious doctrines. There is considerable foundation in Marxism for this concept, stemming from M&E's *The German Ideology*, which essentially takes up such a position. This is also the way the term has been used in mainstream Western political/social analysis.

However the term can also be broadened out to be seen as a necessary structural condition of society: ideology as an essential part of how people are able to cohere as social beings. This also stems from Marx: in particular the first chapter of *Capital*, in which Marx discusses commodity fetishism, that is how in capitalist

society people do not understand certain relations as social relations but instead see them as relations between things.

Some basic assumptions on the way to defining ideology

1. Ideology is not simply a philosophy or a set of specific doctrines. though it may be partially represented systematically by a philosophy, religion, or secular doctrine.
2. Ideology is a system of representation evolved by a specific social group for classical Marxism this most often concerns class, defined in Marx's sense by the relation of a group of people to production (that is economic production; specifically in capitalist society the production of surplus value). in classical Marxism, ideology is often contrasted to "knowledge" (which is "scientific" or "true")
3. Ideology is a social phenomenon based on historical reality and the material processes of life.  
"based on" does not need to mean directly derived from but it does indicate a relationship which can be understood in general
4. Part of ideology is based on, related to, reality; at the same time ideology misrepresents that reality, often by omission.
5. Ideology is not static but always in-process, in change, and open to simultaneously holding opposites in a dynamic tension. (see discussion of dialectics)
6. Ideology does not present the true relation of people to their conditions of existence, but rather a changed one.  
the exact term or metaphor used is significant: false/imaginary/inverted/distorted relation. Each term has a different meaning and implies a somewhat different understanding.
7. Ideology operates on both a conscious and unconscious level. It also operates on a bodily and behavior level.
8. Bourgeois ideology is the dominant ideology of the period in which the bourgeoisie is the dominant class
  - capitalism is the economic system; imperialism is its global manifestation (modified by stages of capitalism; transnational capitalism as more powerful than individual nation-states)
  - industrial production is the typical organization of production
  - liberal democracy is the common form of political organization (modified with local changes) of advanced industrial nations (the state mediates class interests).
  - urbanization is a condition of production
9. Bourgeois ideology is not a totally dysfunctional way of thinking. It is not simply the result of an attempt to manipulate people's understanding or "public opinion" (although such manipulation goes on)  
manipulation theory--Herbert Schiller, Dallas Smythe, George Gerbner, Noam Chomsky, Edward Hermann, Robert McChesney

it is an expression of (part of) people's real lived situation--eg "possessive individualism" from the Reformation to the present  
but it allows no real understanding of the concept of mediations on history by groups. Who is "guilty" for---tendency is to blame everyone or a single figure, rather than see degrees of involvement, qualification, mediation, etc.

10. Bourgeois ideology is relatively systematic, but it contains (has within it) contradictions. It also contains (holds together) contradictions.

11. Ideology is not so much false (in the sense of being a deliberate lie) but is limited severely by conditions of which the subject is unaware.

12. In its functioning, ideology serves specific interests  
bourgeois ideology serves specific class interests but not always in the way (or by whom) it is propagated, but in its long range social function.

key aside:

Marxism is a philosophy of relations. The conditions of any process are part of what that process is. There are not independent and static factors but dynamic and related ones. Marxism assumes movement, process, interconnectedness, change. Marxism tries to study things in change, not in fixity. Essentially this is the concept of dialects. The core statement is in Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks.

Essential rephrasings are

Mao, *On Contradiction* (the most simple)

Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (quite sophisticated)

Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (massively complex)

Althusser, *For Marx*

Ollman, *Alienation; Dialectical Investigations*

Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

two fairly complex re-assessments of the concept

Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*

John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*

## Marxism and Film

version 3.1

[an essay for The Oxford Guide to Film Studies, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and John Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press: forthcoming 1998).]

Chuck Kleinhans

Although Marx never went to the movies, Marxism has significantly affected filmmaking by politically committed directors such as Eisenstein and Gutierrez Al'a as well as shaped the critical and historical analysis of film in aesthetic, institutional, social, and political terms. Fundamental Marxist concepts such as ideology profoundly inform most contemporary theories of and approaches to the analysis of individual films as well as to cinema as a social institution.

Marxism fuses several different sources and types of concern. From English political economy Marx developed his understanding of the economic foundation as fundamentally shaping (though not immutably determining) the social superstructure. From German philosophy, by inverting Hegelian idealism into a materialism that saw the world as historical and dynamically changing, Marx studied capitalism and capitalist societies as always in process. From French socialism, Marx drew his analysis of class-divided society with an active working class struggling for economic and social justice against the ruling capitalist class. Although internally divided by different movements, schools, and tendencies, and sometimes deformed into dogmatism in theory and dictatorship in practice, in its comprehensiveness, and at its best, Marxism provides a remarkably supple method for analysis. It combines practical progressive and democratic political goals with a social examination that centers on historical development and the dialectical potential for change. For this reason, Marxist analysis is an essential part of much contemporary gender, race/ethnicity, and post-colonial thinking in film studies, even when not explicitly underlined.

Marx and Engels did not write a full fledged aesthetics, but their comments on art (almost exclusively on literature ) can be synthesized into a view which validates the Western classics and upholds a broadly construed realism in representation and narration. (Morawski; Solomon.) Marx recognized Balzac as personally a royalist in politics, but viewed his novels as narratives that accurately portrayed the complex social fabric of their time. Similarly, Lenin saw Tolstoi as a political reactionary but the author of novels which mirrored the social-political tensions of Russia. Such was the orthodoxy until the Bolshevik revolution when Marxism shaped cinema and the other arts. With Marxists holding state power, questions of entertainment vs./and instruction, traditional vs. radical form, drama vs. documentary, literary vs. visual communication, native vs. foreign (especially Hollywood) models, ethnic nationalisms vs. national culture, religious vs. secular culture, urban vs. rural, and popular audience vs. intellectual creators, were raised as practical as well as theoretical matters. Intellectuals intensely argued and experienced both the economics of constructing a socialist film industry relying on box office receipts and the relation of creative output to party doctrines and priorities. Eisenstein, Vertov, Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and others wrote as makers while intellectuals from different tendencies participated in the highly political and polemical debates. (Taylor)

The crucible of the Soviet 20s first played out issues still important in later times and other places. In the USSR a national mass culture emerged, itself industrialized in production and partly responsive to market conditions in consumption. The state/party took control of information and journalism, as radio, the newsreel, and educational film developed. And given limited print literacy, print journalism was complemented and in many cases, superseded by audio and visual journalism. A comprehensive understanding of Soviet film demands understanding this larger context. Within the narrower realm of film aesthetics, the period dramatized several key issues. Because many artistic innovators joined the early years of the revolution, film experimentalism appeared in radical forms ranging from Dovshenko's lyrical poeticism to Vertov's rigorous montage of images (and later sound/image), and Eisenstein's epic and operatic work. The intellectual studies of the Russian Formalists contributed to the question of innovative forms matching a revolutionary content. Traditional forms were viewed as compromised, and the possibility of developing intellectual content through the means of film form and expressive stylistics asserted.

At the same time in the West, particularly Germany, a heightened awareness of capitalism's encroachment on the fields of culture and leisure developed with the rise of an urban mass culture audience and new means of mass produced and disseminated culture and journalism: cinema, recorded music, the radio, the picture newspaper, etc. Kracauer (1995), Brecht (1964), and Benjamin (1968) witnessed the expansion of the mass audience fearing for its passivity, but hoping for the new media as possibly liberating. As with the Russians, these thinkers saw cinema as changing perception and cognition as society moved from a written literacy to a visual dominance. New understandings of space and time, heralded in Cubist painting, seemed inherent to film. Informed by Freudian psychology, left intellectuals hoped that new art forms could stimulate new forms of politicized thinking. Brecht argued against the narcotic effects of dominant dramatic forms,

seeing the realist-naturalist tradition since Ibsen as fitting the Aristotelean model of catharsis: raising political issues only to send the audience away purged of any fervor for change. He championed disruptive forms which provoked viewers to new thought.

The rise of German fascism offered a new challenge to Marxist theories, and produced a series of exchanges that marked important differences within Marxist analysis of mass culture. These differences continued in the debate after WW2, and in film studies after 1968. Luk's advocated what amounted to a continuation of 19C realism in literature, while Brecht argued for modernist artistic innovation. Benjamin agreed with Brecht and optimistically projected an inherently radical nature to film, while Marxist-influenced Frankfurt School thinkers Adorno and Horkheimer pessimistically concluded that fascist and US capitalist media were fundamentally alike in producing a passive public. (Adorno, Horkheimer)

While Soviet creative innovation and theoretical variety declined in the 1930's with Stalin's prescriptive doctrine of Socialist Realism in all the arts, in the West some new activities expanded the field of issues for Marxist aesthetics: examples include the development of partisan documentary and grass roots newsreel in the US with the Film and Photo League (Alexander, Campbell) and propaganda films for the Spanish Civil War. In the mid-30's, the abrupt shift in international Communist politics to build a broad anti-fascist Popular Front raised new issues of producing films with and for sympathizers and liberals, such as Renoir's *La Vie est ' nous*. (Buchsbaum) Western communist parties encouraged working with and recruiting people in the dominant capitalist media industries, including Hollywood (which created a pretext for the notorious post-war Red scare and blacklist).

The post WW2 era saw the development of new aspects of Marxism and film. Hollywood emerged stronger than ever, dominating more of the world market. New socialist nations were established in Eastern Europe and China with attendant national cinemas, and Marxists were active in many national liberation movements in the developing world. Italian neorealism provided a model of a humanistic socially committed film practice that eschewed the expensive entertainment and star system of Hollywood while validating matters of social justice, sympathetic depiction of lower classes, and vernacular expression in a thrifty mode. Neorealism influenced independent efforts in the capitalist world, and inspired directors in the developing world, particularly in Latin America and India. Critics too validated neorealism. Bazin as a liberal Catholic could find moral seriousness, while Kracauer, from a critique of mass culture and German expressionist film, found an alternative to frivolousness and emotional manipulation. (Kracauer 1947, 1960) Both posited an ontological basis for film in the replication of the physical world. In general, in the post-War era, Marxists favored an aesthetic of progressive realism which stood against the superficiality of entertainment and allowed for social criticism. Auteurists with progressive credentials such as Visconti and Renoir, Bimal Roy and Mrinal Sen, Kubrick and Welles were esteemed. After Stalin, alternatives to Soviet models gained attention, and new militancy provoked new thinking. In Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Cuba, significant directors and films appeared veering away from Socialist Realist orthodoxy.

In the 1960s a complex set of changes brought about a new stage in Marxist film analysis. Most of the intellectuals involved in developing this stage of film studies were outside of or on the border of academia, coming from journalism, publishing, arts and education administration, or they were students and junior faculty in higher education, often in interdisciplinary or marginalized fields since academic film studies were still being established. Thus many were self-taught in the pertinent issues, and living through the process of discovering what a New Left could be or learning Marxist concepts after beginning political activism. At the same time, local conditions and traditions heavily inflected the reception and diffusion of these ideas. What 'Marxist' meant in each place was distinctly different because of these contexts. And the local situation uniquely shaped the fusion of Marxism with other intellectual trends as well as the emergence of radical cultural analysis. This history played out in diverse radical film magazines. In France *Positif*, *Cin'thique*, and *Cahiers du cin'ma*; in the UK *Screen* and *Framework*, in Canada, *Cin'-Tracts* and *CineAction*, and in the US *Cin'aste* and *Jump Cut*.

By the early 1970s, the center of gravity of Marxist film analysis shifted. Concepts of ideology and realism were drastically re-oriented. The analysis of the dominant Hollywood cinema and European art film as 'illusionist,' and that illusion having an ideological effect, evolved from several developments. The optimism of 19C Marxism in assuming that revolution would take place in the most industrialized nations as trade union and electoral politics heightened worker's consciousness and capacity for revolutionary change was severely damaged by the nationalist division during WW1, the appearance of revolution in Russia (the most backward of the capitalist nations with an overwhelming peasant base), and the acceptance of fascism by the many of the masses in Italy and Germany. As a result, western Marxists sought deeper explanations. For some, insights from Freudian psychology showed the persistence of deep patterns in the conscious/unconscious mind. For others the insights of Lenin's contemporary, the Italian Gramsci were helpful, particularly in his emphasis that people were not simply coercively forced by the state's police authority, but also manipulated by the hegemony or dominance of ruling class cultural and social structures of society to stay in place, to accept the existing order

as 'natural.'

In classical Marxism, ideology was generally understood as the propagation of false ideas by the capitalist class, producing a 'false consciousness' in the masses which could then be countered by revolutionary 'correct ideas.' In the 60s, ideology was increasingly understood as a structural condition operating like myth in traditional societies described by L'vi-Strauss: fairly complex patterns which embodied narratives and contradictions to functionally maintain order. In modern cultures, the mass media could be seen as promulgating similar myths. (Barthes) French philosopher Althusser drew from Mao, Gramsci, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to posit a concept of ideology which stressed that people are socially positioned in power relationships and internalize this in their unconscious: a concept given further elaboration by Foucault who emphasized the social basis of ideology by considering institutions and history. Such an understanding of ideology meshed well with developments in semiotics and long standing analogies between film and dreams, daydreams, hypnotic and other liminal mental states, although it tended to produce a pessimistic deterministic view of the potential for change. Althusser argued that revolutionary theory could move beyond ideology: a notion that (few noticed) reproduced the Leninist model with Marxist theorists occupying the position formerly held by vanguard party activists in relation to the proletariat. (Althusser)

This view lead in one direction to a position virtually identical with the Frankfurt School's pessimistic denunciation of mainstream film as narcotic, or circus-like distractions, validating only rigorous high modernist art (Scho'nberg, Joyce) as truly revolutionary. Althusser also inspired arguments that by resisting the illusionary cinema of 'bourgeois' realism, a radical modernist form could be wedded to a politically radical content, leading some critics to validate directors such as Oshima and Straub-Huillet. With translations and new critical attention, Benjamin's artwork essay and other writings gained new attention, while the revived Brecht/Luk'cs debate became the theoretical ground for an endorsement of formal innovation and explicit politics over traditional realism. Simultaneously, Eisenstein's films and writings were recast as aesthetic experiments, and Vertov's self-reflexive Chelovek s kinoapparatom (1929, Soviet Union) rediscovered as an avant garde work which explored the epistemology of film. Meanwhile in the developing world, Solanas and Getino called for a militant Third Cinema poised apart from Hollywood and auteurist art cinema, (Solanas) and Garcia Espinosa defended Cuban cinema as necessarily 'imperfect' compared to high production value Hollywood, but to be valued for its political content. (Garcia Espinosa) Complemented by a wave of militant and innovative films in Latin America (and later Africa and South Asia), such arguments strengthened the case for a militant aesthetics.

It is a truism that c. 1970 contemporary film studies came into being through the weaving together of Marxism, structuralism, Saussurean linguistics, psychoanalysis, and semiotics, and then was further elaborated in post-structuralist terms. In some cases the changes amounted to complete reversals. The tradition of social documentary was called into question because of its unreflective realism. A European auteur such as Bergman, previously praised for his high moral seriousness, was critiqued for being too theatrical by an increasingly cinematically sophisticated audience, or Persona (1966, Sweden) was validated for its complex self-referentiality. But the biggest change came in a shift in the left analysis of commercial entertainment cinema as Hollywood film was reinterpreted as fundamentally realist. Thus a normative realism, understood as identical with Hollywood's practice of illusionism, was seen as producing a coherent imaginary subject position. Audience pleasure was seen as originating in the cinematic apparatus (the ensemble of physical and social conventions that govern the cinema institution including the subject's psychology) and its illusionism, rather than contingent narrative practices, performance, and spectacle. In contrast, a self-reflexive modernism and avant garde practices can be read as themselves producing a dispersal of meaning and deconstructing the subject position, thus calling into question both illusionism and the dominant ideology. As a result some interpreted an extreme formalism as sufficient to establish a work as politically radical, irrespective of content, as, for example, with Cahiers du cin'ma's validation of Jerry Lewis's The Bellboy (1960, USA), and in Gidal's advocacy of 'structural/materialist' films, while others critiqued the idea that self-reflexivity alone was political. (Gidal, Polan)

While the overall change can be summed up as the 'politicizing of form,' the precise working out varied from individual to individual, by nation, and with uneven access to ideas and films in translation. It also produced logical inconsistencies. For example, in line with their then-Maoist politics, in 1972 Cahiers du cin'ma enthusiastically validated the Godard-Gorin 'Groupe Dziga Vertov' films (1968-72)--intensely radical in form and content--as well as formally conventional Chinese documentaries. Given the investment in auteurist approaches to Hollywood prevalent in the 60s, French and Anglophone critics who were pushed in the direction of Marxist thought and politics by the heated political climate of the times, tended to justify the auteurist canon using the new insights of Marxist thought. Cahiers du cin'ma put forth a broad agenda for criticism in 1969, 'Cin'ma/id'ologie/critique,' which granted considerable leeway for considering films which appeared to be under the dominant ideology, but which escaped through formal 'cracks and fissures'. (Comolli) The classic demonstration was their analysis of Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln (1939, USA) which argued that the director's 'inscription' of a unique 'writing' opened gaps in the text which were evidence providing an escape from ideology. (The editors, Cahiers du cin'ma,

1976) Left authorship analysis promoted various figures such as Nicholas Ray and Sirk who could be read as offering a fundamental critique of social institutions. The critics' motivation can be understood as stemming both from a desire to validate popular film and from the persistence of an aesthetic centered on creators. Following Bazin's dictum that 'style creates meaning,' and repeating the argument of conservative auteurist Sarris, left critics asserted Sirk's formal manipulations called his ostensibly shallow and glossy melodramas into question. For example, Paul Willemen concluded: '...by altering the rhetoric of bourgeois melodrama, through stylization and parody, Sirk's films distanciate themselves from the bourgeois ideology.' (Willemen: 67) Essentially these positions attributed class politics to cinema style. In the same vein, Godard's *Le Week-end* (1967, France) was interpreted by Henderson as having 'a non--bourgeois camera style' without further specification as to whether that was then a working class style. (Henderson, 1972, 1976)

The errors of this type of analysis were based on conflating two false concepts: that ideology directly reflects class identity, and that the film was the sole source of meaning. As further consideration (including critiques of some ludicrous case studies) demonstrated the flaws, positions were modified and ideology was understood in a much more flexible way. While the critique of simple reflectionist concepts of 'realism' in cinematography and as an aesthetic was maintained, and the ideological nature of the apparatus was understood, increasingly theory turned to examining the meaning of a film as produced by an interaction between a text and a spectator who was understood not as an ahistorical 'subject' but as an historical person with social attributes of gender, race, class, age, nationality, etc.--all of which shaped the interpretive context. With history re-admitted to the analytic frame, institutional analyses, including economic issues were considered.

Marxism contributes to contemporary film studies in historical, economic, and ideological analysis, as well as media activism. Drawing on its founders' own interests and methods, Marxism emphasizes historical analysis which aims at providing a broad context stressing multiple interacting factors including social, economic, and political connections. The revival of historical analysis reminds us that in an earlier period many film historians were Marxists: Sadoul, Kracauer, Leyda, and Lewis Jacobs. Contemporary counterparts include Burch, Chanan, Elsaesser, James, Kreimeier, and Staiger. Studies of the class composition of cinema's past audiences, the representation of class in film, and the labor history of the cinema industry obviously interest Marxists. Wary of simple reflectionist models of film and society, Marxists remain committed to understanding the relation of film art and social/political activity. Two persistent themes are the historical film (a staple of Marxist filmmaking) and the analysis of current history in terms of the proliferation and combination of new media technologies.

Because of its inherent interest in industrial and global economics, Marxism is the primary methodology of most economic analysis of film and mass communications in general. Such studies involve not only questions of finance, production, and marketing, but also state policies. (Pendakur, Wasko) Combined with studio and industrial histories, in the past such analyses have often made sweeping generalizations about actual films and their reception, but a younger generation of researchers combine political economy with textual and reception analysis and avoid simplistic assertions of economic determinism of cultural production. Increasingly issues of transnational capital, globalization of the market, capitalist ownership and control of national film cultures, and intellectual property rights focus the analysis. (Mattelart and Mattelart)

Marxism has had a long standing relation to questions of political action and media. This has tended to be expressed in terms of films for propaganda and agitation, and especially in terms of a class or anti-imperialist analysis. The validation of new films/videos and the promotion of documentary has been at stake. (Waugh, Steven) The development of a more sophisticated Marxist media theory has affected makers since the 60s, especially with the postmodernist increase in self-conscious analytical/expository strategies combined with the social documentary tradition. Such work often discusses social/political issues such as race, nationalism, and AIDS, and critiques the dominant media representation of those concerns.

Today Marxism seems most dynamic when it combines its analysis of class with an analysis of gender, race, national, postcolonial and other issues raised by progressive social/political movements. Some claim that the fall of the Soviet Union made Marxism obsolete. However as a critical analysis of capitalist societies, at a time when the gap between rich and poor nations and between capitalist and working classes within those nations is growing, its relevance is assured.

[end]

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[NB: although the conventional style in Latin America is to use the patronym (Gutierrez) this individual chose to use the matronym (Al'a) for identification]

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Chuck Kleinhans

## NOTES ON THE MARXIST STUDY OF POPULAR CULTURE

1. While recognizing that the best definition of "culture" is a broad one, such as anthropologists use, for practical reasons of time and length I will restrict my points specifically to the western mass arts, that is: those arts in the western capitalist world which have mass distribution (across class and other social group lines). I will not deal with all popular leisure activities that are within the domain of popular culture studies, such as participant and spectator sports (1), or arts daily available to mass viewing such as architecture (2). By "study" I mean criticism, and its constituent activities--philology, description, analysis, and evaluation--and its theoretical foundation. By "Marxist" I mean the general parameters of world Marxist thought since Marx began writing, though it well be clear to Marxists that my orientation is to western philosophical Marxism since Lenin (3). Also, for reasons of time, I will put aside many of the questions which are traditionally of special interest in Marxist cultural criticism, such as the role of the artist and intellectual in society, the question of realism, the distinction of high and mass art, etc.

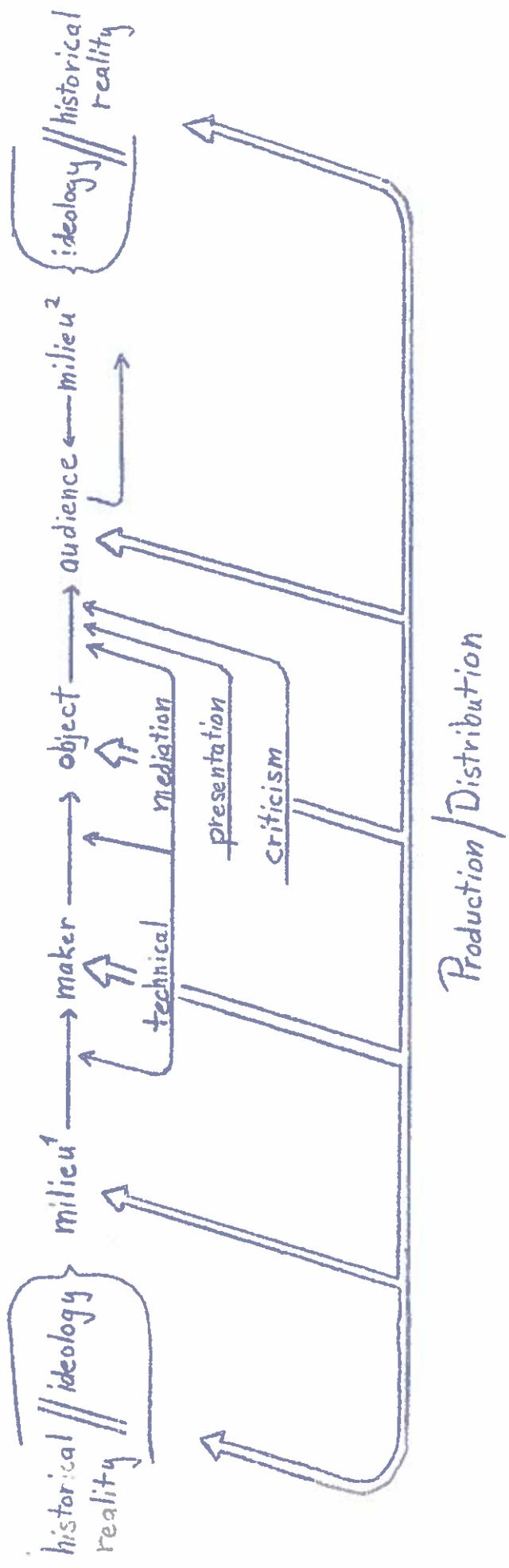
2. Marxism, as Jean-Paul Sartre has argued, is the "impassible philosophy" of our time (4). To apply that claim to the subject at hand, Marxism provides the "impassible" foundation for a genuine

critical study of popular culture (5).

3. The Marxist study of popular culture deals with its object of study in three ways which together distinguish it from other theories and methodologies. First, the object of study, which may be single or multiple (a genre, theme, set of related objects produced over a period of time, etc.), is not seen in isolation, but as part of a system of relations, and understood as existing only within that system, and therefore is to be studied only with reference to that system. Second, the approach is sociological and historical. The object of study cannot be finally abstracted from the society in which it is made and exists, nor from the historical development of that society (6). Third, it is explicitly intentional and political in its nature, whereas other theories and methodologies are equally political, but usually covertly so (7).

4. The following paradigm (diagram 1) provides a basic Marxist methodological model for the study of popular culture (8). For purposes of explanation, I will consider it here as dealing with a single object (movie, pop song, comic book, etc.). The paradigm presents a system with six basic subsystems. Caveat: the division is, as with all abstractions, a division for conceptual purposes.

Diagram 1



It has no especial significance apart from its use as a methodological tool to study concrete objects and their mode of existance.

5. The pre-object milieu (hereafter milieu<sup>1</sup>) consists of everything which significantly influences the maker of the object to the point when it is completed (when it is no longer under the maker's control). It is important to distinguish two distinct parts of milieu<sup>1</sup>: <historical reality and ideology.> By ideology I mean not simply a philosophy (Puritanism, Existentialism, etc.) but rather a system of representation evolved by a specific social group. Ideology is a social product based on historical reality--the material processes of life--which presents a "lived" relation of people and the world, or a reflected form of that relation (e.g., a philosophy). Ideology does not present the true relation of people to their conditions of existence but rather how they respond to their true conditions of existence. This presupposes a real relationship and an imaginary relationship. Historical reality is the real relationship and ideology the imaginary one. There is always a contradiction between the two (9). The dominant ideology in the western capitalist countries is that of its ruling class, the bourgeoisie. One of the difficulties this perspective presents for any type of cultural study is that in addition to considering the most obvious influences on the maker, such as his/her means of production and distribution, we must also

consider the way in which ideology mediates the maker's understanding of his/her own situation, and the influence of those socio-historical factors which are most impregnated with ideology: language, artistic and social conventions, the tradition of the art form, etc. In its widest sense, milieu<sup>1</sup> is everything that forms an interface with the maker at the time of making; in practical terms, the critic wants to distinguish those factors, both real and ideological, which are most significant in influencing the nature of the completed object.

6. <The maker> in the mass arts is almost always a group (10).

In film criticism, for example, the idea of a controlling individual as maker, the director, is a useful fiction or shorthand, but should not obscure the inherently collective nature of filmmaking (11). The significance of any member of the group is measured only in relation to the others and depends on the amount of control he/she has over the finished product.

7. The completed <object> receives real and ideological factors from milieu<sup>1</sup> via the maker. Since this process implies a certain selection and shaping, part of the critic's work is to describe the relative uniqueness of the object of study. However it must also be kept in mind that the object exists as part of a process. Any popular culture object comes into being with an assumption on

the part of the maker of its commodity nature: before it is completed it is made with an understanding of its consumers, or audience. Thus the completed object cannot be divorced from the process in which it comes into being and exists (12).

8. The audience is both the total collective audience for the object and individuals within the collective audience. Recognizing individuality, however, should not lead to the nominalist position that every individual response is totally unique. Obviously some degree of generalization about audience response is needed for critical thought. However such generalization often falls into the error of assuming a homogeneous audience (as found in phrases such as "the American public," "the universal appeal of...," "everyone has experienced...," "America's sex symbol...," etc.), which really demonstrates chauvinist ethnocentricity, as feminists, blacks, latinos, and other dissenters from mass art norms have repeatedly pointed out. The audience for mass art must be conceived of as pluralistic, and which audience one is talking about must be qualified with considerations of class, race, sex, age, language, ethnic identity, etc. (13).

*next*  
9. The milieu of the audience (milieu<sup>2</sup>) is always to some extent different from that of the maker. The audience draws on its milieu (historical reality mediated by ideology) to understand

the object and in turn acts upon its milieu.

10. *base/super*  
The production and distribution system (which includes marketing and consumption) is understood both generally (the specific nature of the capitalist system during the time span considered) and the form of capitalist enterprise specific to the object (the film industry, the rock music industry, etc.). The production/distribution system is the determinant subsystem within the paradigm, in the last case. That is, production/distribution has the greatest influence of all subsystems on all other subsystems and on the system as a functioning whole. That this subsystem has the greatest impact of all the subsystems can be seen in the inescapable fact that the primary function of mass art in a capitalist society is to make a profit from its production and distribution.

11. It is frequently useful to specify for purposes of analysis various factors which form *institutionalized relationships* between the parts of the system. Three which are usually of interest are the technical, the mode of presentation, and criticism. Technical or technological matters specific to the object of study are often and erroneously considered as autonomous. For example we frequently find students of film referring to an internal history of the development of cinematography. This error has

been extensively analyzed by Cahiers du cinéma (14). It must be kept in mind that popular culture in particular is subject to rapid technological change, and that such change is closely linked to production and distribution (15). Technological conditions and the closely related area of the mode of presentation or transmission of the popular culture object affect the making, the existence, and the reception of the object, both setting limits and creating possibilities (16). Criticism is another institutionalized connection, acting between the object and the audience to influence reception. Despite its self-proclaimed autonomy, criticism functions as a consumer guide, which reveals its roots in the marketing of popular culture (17).

12. The relationship between the object and the audience is an especially significant and useful part of the paradigm to analyze. In the study of popular culture it is this relationship which defines the object as popular. The best Marxist and non-Marxist studies of popular culture have increasingly focused on this relationship, and the question of how to study it has raised the greatest recent controversy. Part of the problem is due to the dual nature of audience response: it is both temporal (during the direct experience) and memorial (afterwards). In either case the object has presumably affected the audience's consciousness (18). But any such change can only be determined if it is

expressed in behavior, and the observation and measurement of behavior is notoriously difficult (19). Marxism provides not a final answer but an essential direction here. Marx's point that human consciousness is the product of (conditioned by, not immutably determined by) social relations, and that those relations are historical in nature, allows us to consider the effect of the object within the matrix of the audience's social existence (20). Applying this insight to concrete study is not simple, but it restrains us from the bizarre position of most bourgeois popular culture criticism: separating popular culture from what makes it popular--people (21).

13. There is general agreement among Marxists as to the hegemony of bourgeois ideology in western capitalist societies, that is, that the ruling class effectively controls ideology, just as it controls the means of production (22). However two different conceptions of the nature of this control have been put forward. The inculcation model, which is very close to the concept of propaganda, assumes that ruling class ideology directly shapes the consciousness of other classes, even the structure of needs of the mass audience (23). The other view, to which I subscribe, is the institutional model, which sees ideological control as a circumscribing of perspectives, a placing of parameters on the flow of ideas in society (24). From this perspective, bourgeois

ideological hegemony is seen as a structural condition of bourgeois society. Also from this view, the question of what is left out is as important as what is present in the popular culture object, and the consideration of radical alternative critiques of the object is crucial (25).

14. The popular culture object reflects and expresses reality as mediated by ideology, and it subsequently influences the audience and thereby re-enters ideology and history. Understanding this dual nature of the object is especially important, for it is not adequately considered as simply a reflection of the milieu (26), nor is it simply an influence on the audience. The object itself is almost always somewhat ambiguous, condensed, polyvalent, or contains evidence of contradictions--in short, it is overdetermined (27). In addition, the audience's understanding (both singular and collective) of the object is itself almost always overdetermined (28). These two overdeterminations result in a complex multiplicity in the object-audience relationship. This complexity explains how audience's are able to have completely diverse understandings of the same object (29).

15. It is also important to understand that the object affects the audience both in its form and in its content (30). There is relatively little disagreement about content influencing audience,

but the influence of form is often overlooked, misunderstood, or dismissed (31). Among Marxists there is not a consensus on the question of form. My position is that form does have an ideological effect on audience, but I am not convinced that form can significantly change consciousness. Form cannot be considered only with reference to the object, for the object does not "have" form, but only shows manifestations of form. Those manifestations become form only in the audience (32).

16. Marxism does not provide a single specific methodology for studying popular culture, as any brief survey of the variety of Marxist studies in the human sciences will reveal. What Marxism does furnish is a basic foundation for evaluating a methodology. Thus Marxism provides a view of humans and their social relations, an understanding of history, a description of the interrelation of economic, political, and social factors, an analysis of the nature and importance of class and other social group factors, etc.--in short, a view of the human universe and how to understand it.

17. Similarly, the paradigm presented here does not provide exact answers to questions such as "what is the relation of the capitalist economic system and a specific popular culture object?" Rather, the paradigm raises such questions. Two recent methodologies seem especially useful when used in conjunction with a Marxist

approach. One is structuralism, which can aid the investigation by discovering homologous structures in each of the subsystems of the paradigm (33). The other is semiology, the study of communications, particularly as developed by Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco. Both have shown the importance of viewing popular culture objects as "open" and as existing only in the context of an audience (34).

18. The Marxist study of popular culture, I indicated earlier, is intentional and political. It must define itself in opposition to the bourgeois study of popular culture, most importantly when the nature and functions of popular culture are mystified, but also when bourgeois criticism claims "objectivity" in order to defend an oppressive status quo. As Marx said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." (35) A Marxist cannot rest on the mere interpretation of popular culture, but must work as well for changes that will change popular culture and make it a part of the struggle for human liberation.

## NOTES

1. For an excellent overview: Mark Naison, "Sports and the American Empire," Radical America 6:4 (July-Aug., 1972), 95-120. It is especially important to remember that the mass arts must compete not only with each other (one film vs. another; tv vs. reading) but also with other leisure activities--hobbies, games, socializing, etc.
2. For the fundamentals of considering architecture as a mass art: Umberto Eco, La Structure Absente: Introduction à la recherche sémiotique (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), pp. 259-317. (Translation and revision by the author of La Struttura assente, (Milan: Bompiani, 1968). Popular structures are both unique (the Empire State Building, the Golden Gate Bridge) and mass produced (McDonald's hamburger stores, shopping centers, mobile homes).
3. For an excellent group of introductory essays on the major figures and trends: Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare, eds., The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin (New York: Basic, 1972). A number of periodicals in English provide a continuing discussion: New Left Review, Radical America, Socialist Revolution, Telos, New German Critique; also see more specific radical publications such as, for film, Cinéaste, Women & Film, and Jump Cut.
4. Search for a Method, tr. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Vintage/ Random House, 1963).
5. Unfortunately, American intellectuals often have little first hand knowledge of the basic texts and ideas of Marxism, and at best

Familiarity with some of the liberal bourgeois refutations of Vulgar Marxism and Stalinism. The situation in western Europe is quite different, where every intellectual must come to terms with a living tradition of Marxism, and where Marxists and non-Marxists heavily influenced by Marxism have been in the lead of popular culture studies. That this panel is the first Marxist presentation at a Popular Culture Association meeting is evidence of how far we have to go.

6. Abstraction is of course necessary for critical thought; the problem begins when that abstraction is not returned to the concrete. For an excellent introduction to the problems of establishing a Marxist epistemology see Bertell Ollman, Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society (Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1971), particularly Part One, "Philosophical Introduction." Ollman, however, tends to neglect Marx's concept of history.

7. This assertion should not seem unusual to students of popular culture, who frequently find their colleagues contemptuous of popular as distinct from "high" art. The study of popular culture itself in such an academic situation is a political act, though it may not be recognized as such, until review for promotion or tenure..

8. I cannot go into the communication model on which this paradigm is based here. It is similar to that of Umberto Eco, with whom I am in substantial agreement, with some important differences. The paradigm may strike some Marxists familiar with Marxist aesthetics as unusual. I have found Marxist aesthetics in many cases (e.g. Lukács) of marginal value in dealing with popular culture, because of its focus on traditional high culture.

9. I am following here Louis Althusser's discussion of ideology and contradiction, particularly as developed in For Marx, tr. Ben Brewster, (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1970) and Lenin and Philosophy, tr. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971). I am familiar with the Marxist criticisms of Althusser, which focus on his earlier Reading "Capital" and attack his concept of the epistemological break. Those critiques do not appear to me to invalidate Althusser's concept of ideology, particularly as it is refined in the later Lenin and Philosophy. Althusser's concepts applied to mass art is worked out in Pierre Macherey, Pour une théorie de la production littéraire (Paris: Maspero, 1966), particularly the essay on Lenin's analysis of Tolstoy, which considers art and ideology at length, and the study of Jules Verne as a popular writer.

10. For analytic purposes the maker in the high arts is almost always best considered as a group as well. One of the mystifications introduced by Romantic aesthetics -- individual creativity and expression -- has confused the issue. Artists seldom operate without the direct influence of publishers, editors, patrons, gallery owners, producers, etc., who to a greater or lesser extent exercise control over the nature and existence of the object. Similarly, our cultural past has been preserved by curators and librarians, i.e., employees of the ruling class of their time; the selection of what is worth preserving is clearly biased.

11. The original auteur critics recognized this, though incompletely.

12. We must also specify the exact object, which may be elusive. For example, a popular song can exist as printed words and music, or in a

live performance, or as a recorded document (tape, record, film, videotape).

13. For an elaboration and application of this argument see my "The Contemporary Working Class Film Hero: Evel Knievel and The Last American Hero," Jump Cut, no. 2 (July-August 1974) (forthcoming).

14. See the articles by Jean-Louis Comolli in Cahiers du cinéma, no. 228 (May-June 1971) and subsequent issues. Translations will probably be forthcoming in Screen.

15. To take a simple example, the change in popular music from the 78 rpm low fidelity monaural record to the 45 and the 33 1/3 longplaying stereo or quadraphonic high fidelity record and tapes has affected the changes in popular music over the past two decades. The proliferation of small transistor radios with poor speakers changed instrumentation for top-40 recordings, while the sophisticated recording and play-back equipment of recent years has allowed very subtle instrumentation in the album/tape market. These changes are not autonomous and should be understood in the light of the logic of planned obsolescence in marketing playback equipment.

16. A great deal of study needs to be done in this area. An exemplary study of live performance is found in Charles Keil, Urban Blues (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1966). We need similarly sophisticated studies of mass media presentation.

17. Functioning as a consumer guide is not a bad function of criticism, especially when one considers the high cost of popular culture such as

films (tickets, transportation, baby sitter, etc) for the average American. Critics usually attempt to disguise this function of their work, especially their complicity in promotion of objects. (For a clever article on how reviewers -- who are basically critics, but for a larger audience -- were manipulated to shape the reception of Last Tango in Paris, see Clark Whelton, "Deep Brando," Village Voice, Feb. 8, 1973). A useful corrective to the usual mystification of criticism and culture: C. Wright Mills, "The Culture Industry," in his Power, Politics and People (London: Oxford U.P., 1963). Mills is especially good on the commodity nature of mass culture, pointing out that there is not a free consumer choice of culture, but that the external factor of availability and the subjective condition of sensibility (which rests on the general cultural atmosphere and training before the age of consent) determines what is accepted as popular culture.

18. Theoretical discussion of this began with Plato and Aristotle but was detoured with Kant and Romantic aesthetics and their postulation of "disinterested" aesthetic contemplation. Contemporary aesthetics is just beginning to abandon that untenable position and deal with the major trend of all the arts of our century to be open or incomplete objects which are completed only by the audience.

19. This is, of course, a major problem for the social sciences. It is equally a problem for the study of popular culture. How do we know, for example, the actual effect of a film, The Exorcist say, on an audience. The publicity surrounding the film claims it has resulted in nightmares, and those reports could be investigated. Strict empiricists could measure the reported vomitings during viewings.

20. This is problematic. It is also the area of the greatest and most fruitful controversy among Marxists interested in cultural phenomena. That it is problematic cannot keep us from moving ahead as best we can.

21. Traditional rhetorical analysis is useful, but limited in this regard, because it tends to focus on the object as effecting a culturally virgin audience. Some recent European work promises to move beyond these limits, particularly the semiological studies of Roland Barthes and the Communications group in France, Umberto Eco's semiology in Italy, the Centre for Cultural Studies (Birmingham) in England, and a number of German researchers. (On the latter, see Joachim Bark, "Research in Popular Literature and Praxis-Related Literary Scholarship: A Report," New German Critique 1:1 (Winter, 1973), 133-141.

22. For these points I am indebted to David L. Sallach, "The Meaning of Hegemony," a paper presented at the Antonio Gramsci conference in St. Louis, 1973, and recently published in the Australian Left Review (references unavailable) and Sallach, "Class Domination and Ideological Hegemony," The Sociological Quarterly (Feb., 1974).

23. Demonstration of the inculcation thesis is most easily made with reference to formal and informal control and censorship. Consider the French radio and television system, the motion picture production code, pornography laws, blacklisting, etc. A much different analysis which arrives at the same conclusion has been proposed by theorists such as Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno. While they do not see ideological control as quite so directly in the hands of the ruling class, they

find modern capitalist society organized in such a way through work, everyday life, and so forth that non-bourgeois classes have essentially duplicated bourgeois ideology within themselves. This view tends to be deeply pessimistic about the possibilities of changing the system.

24. Consider the range of "differing views" presented on a typical television panel: conservative Republican to liberal Democrat, but no anti-capitalist view. More subtly on television, parameters are placed on ideas by the positing of norms: the naturalness of male superiority and domination, the everydayness of economic inequality, and so forth. The institutional model recognizes the existence of a distinct non-bourgeois consciousness in non-bourgeois members of the mass audience. From reading mainstream empirical American sociology on this matter, it appears to me that non-bourgeois audiences are especially selective in their response to mass media, tending to select what is self-validating and confirms their life as they experience it, and discounting the rest. Some useful perspectives on the question of ruling class ideology in culture and its effect on audiences who are not members of the ruling class: The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1973) (especially the essays by Ellen Cantarow, Katherine Ellis, Barbara Kessel, and Martha Vicinus); also the essay by Meredith Tax in Radical Perspectives in the Arts, ed. Lee Baxandall (Baltimore, Penguin, 1972).

25. A very large number of such critiques have emerged from the radical movements of the last decade: black and other racial/ethnic minorities, feminists, gays and lesbians, and class-conscious people.

26. Or an imaginative representation of the milieu as shaped by the maker, to be more sophisticated.

27. The object is connotative as well as denotative. The concept of overdetermination is developed in Althusser's work to discuss contradiction. It is borrowed and changed from Freud's use of the term to deal with ambiguity in dreams and condensation in jokes, and overdetermination or similar terms such as polyvalence have been used in recent semiology to deal with the same matter.

28. For the collective audience this should be obvious from the preceding discussion. The individual has the capacity to hold contradictions in response to the object.

29. A simple example is provided by the figure of Archie Bunker in the television comedy "All In the Family." Archie is a stereotype of the "Middle American"; it is precisely that he is a stereotype that allows him to be seen by some as a fool and by others as merely foolish. Is Archie a butt of satire? For some viewers, yes; for others he is a comic hero. This ambiguity stems both from the characterization of Archie and from variety in the audience. A case like this should expose the dangers of assuming a homogeneous audience for mass art. To extend the point: the object (i.e., audience understanding of it) changes with the audience's changes over time. Thus yesterday's object becomes today's nostalgia and tomorrow's camp.

30. Form and content cannot be separated, save for expediency, but everyone recognizes this and everyone does it.

31. On the Marxist critique of bourgeois form see Bertolt Brecht's writings on the theatre. The critique of bourgeois form has been extended recently in France in particular: see after May-June 68, the Tel Quel group of critics, and in film, the work of Jean-Luc Godard, Cahiers du cinéma, and Cinéthique. In the U.S. Fredric Jameson has opened the question with his Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton, Princeton U.P., 1971).

32. That form can autonomously change consciousness and thereby behavior has been most strongly argued by various formalists and the avant-garde. My skepticism rests on several points. Formal innovations in the mass arts seem rapidly absorbed into the most common consciousness. For example, film techniques that were innovative a decade ago (rapid montage editing, the jump cut, extreme wide angle lens work, allowing sun flare to be part of the image) are now found in television commercials with nonnoticeable change in audience consciousness. With reference to non-representational and non-referential art such as instrumental music, it seems that there actually is a reference -- to the conventions of that category. Thus, while works of "pure form" certainly exist, they do not exist purely, but are understandable only because of convention. Thus the very idea of innovation presumes something antecedent, which is known, and the new can only be new in relation to what came before. It is forever stuck with the past it revolts against, or else it is incomprehensible. The attempt to transcend history through form is interesting, though futile. And it is reactionary to the extent that it presumes that consciousness precedes social existence.

33. Of course structures must be seen as historical. Eco provides a thorough critique of the ahistorical and idealistic trend of Levi-Strauss and his followers.

34. Barthes earlier work has been translated, but not his most recent (and more important) work such as S/Z. Though not a Marxist, Barthes has been heavily influenced by Marxism and it is clear that his work has been a continuous effort to specify and critique the nature of bourgeois ideology in culture. Eco's major work to date, La Struttura assente has been announced as a forthcoming translation by Mouton. For an example of his work in popular culture: "Rhetoric and Ideology in Eugene Sue's The Mysteries of Paris," International Review of Social Sciences (UNESCO) 19:4 (1967).

35. Marx, eleventh of the "Theses on Feuerbach" appended to The German Ideology.

1)

Buhle



Gans — multiple perception

① pure culture > urban folk

② withdrawal > vs. mass culture  
reaction vs. mass culture

avant-garde

③ pop front culture >

not right but attempt to respond

late 60s - 70s - break w/ high tradition  
overcoming  
prog. pop art front >  
culture - location for

Metzger

women's culture —

not in comm. culture

not a product of fashion

women's conversation

not an exchange of information  
a reaching for community  
communitas

consciousness  
organizing  
connection

date - isolation

supposed trivialness of it



Dario

Boring art - profit oriented

Basically — ideal manipulation —  
socializing.

distraught <  
or conservative <



irrelevant to social action

redundant inferences

analyses w/o moving to praxis

Commedia

think of theatre thru other media

movie



## Kunzel

Disney world >  
amusement parks >  
parcs

unhistorical  
colonial not included  
classical depravity

1 Disideal. of its own.  
comes to substitute for reality.

comics-franchised out  
a sub-ideology. —

Uncle Scrooge

group operation of films  
comics -> separate >

2 non-homogeneous and

foreign and for comic

cross-cultural franchise.... >

"taste to appropriate - comes later tech.  
W/

3 resp. - children - great unknown factor  
preservation/reading/sharing >

contents of publications from  
human activities innocent

leads to form approach melody drama

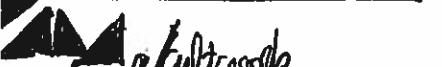
① to PCA

② mark  
focusing to step into Gramsci  
Barthes >

Andreas.

high cult as well

expand diagram hist. too synchronic \*

 a cult goods  
material goods  
take false needs seriously \*

① Roma - con-rads.  
D - cultural environment

Paul B } polyglotous  
Davis } diff. responses.

can get too hung up on  
ideol.

Hordeon  
death of  
Carrie

< success myth  
< failure myth / gangster  
TVs.  
GATT > success  
EK moderation terms

## More avant garde

One of the first acts in cultural analysis is setting up the terms of what will be studied. This is inevitably an inductive/deductive process in which the researcher starts with a broad intuitive sense of what needs to be defined and then tries to set up terms, boundaries, limits so that the work can move forward. But in the process, boundaries may change and definitions may need to be changed. The very definition of the field shapes what kinds of questions can be raised. The downside is that the work being done can simply be circular, and finally banal. The upside is that new ideas may come forward, and thus genuinely new knowledge can be generated.

Avant garde  
Experimental  
Underground  
New American Cinema  
Independent  
Sundance

My specific concern is the field of experimental film and video. What do we mean by “experimental”? That varies a bit with different historians and critics and artists having slightly different views,

When I first arrived at the Radio/Television/Film department at Northwestern, there was a common operating definition that films could be divided into three “modes”: dramatic narratives, documentaries, and experimental.

Fred camper definition

New York's Cinema 16, founded in the postwar era as a showcase and forum for independent film, organized in 1953 a symposium on “Poetry and the Film” that offered the first real public debate on the theory behind what was then considered experimental film. significantly, the first record of the avant garde film project is an aesthetic statement which addresses itself to political concerns largely in terms of stating its antagonistic relation to the Hollywood money men. The symposium centered on Maya Deren's presentation of the “horizontal” (i.e., dramatic, narrative) elements of cinema in relation to its “vertical” (i.e., poetic, nonnarrative) potential, using as an explanatory example the value of the soliloquies in Shakespeare's plays, prized for their poetry although they often seem tangential to the plays' dramatic development or conclusion. Deren was a notable figure in the avant garde at this time, not only for her films, but for her ceaseless proselytizing. determined to close the gap between the avant garde filmmaker and the public, and taking audience ignorance as cause for communication, not condemnation, she continually explicated her work and aims. similarly democratic impulses inspired Jonas Mekas and Vogel to build an institutional base for independent

filmmaking: distribution and exhibition (Vogel's Cinema 16) and criticism (Mekas' Film culture). This base helped to break down the isolation of the individual artist, to validate a cultural alternative to the dominant commercial cinema, to foster the imagining of other possibilities, and to provide the communication and resources that would allow a new cinema to come into being. Both Mekas and Vogel were eclectic in their taste and generous in their support. Vogel held to the position that, "in the last analysis, every work of art, to the extent that it is original and breaks with the past instead of repeating it, is subversive."<sup>1</sup> The implicit limits of this position were pointed out later by critic Parker Tyler (also a symposium participant). Tracing the relationship of Beat culture to the anti-establishment thinking of underground filmmakers, his 1969 comment has the clarity of hindsight:

Curiously enough, the Underground Film movement,...can be identified as having traits of both Anarchist and Communist philosophy. The catch is that...the movement has taken specifically formal virtues as the object of destruction, and has done so not autocratically, by rigidly excluding those virtues, but by using its universal-tolerance code.<sup>2</sup>

The development of this universal tolerance code could be seen in 1960 when a different meeting took place. The convening of the New American Cinema group, an uneasy alliance of the political and the poetic, produced a founding statement with anti-capitalist tendencies. The 25 member group called for new methods of financing independent films, praised personal expression, condemned censorship, placed itself in opposition to the current distribution-exhibition policies which it thought high time to "blow up." And mandated Emile de Antonio to set up a distribution cooperative. A new stage had been reached in the New American Cinema. The eclectic spirit succeeded in opening up the ranks of the avant garde to a broad range of cinematic strategies, as the first four Film Culture annual awards confirm. they were given to low-budget fictional narration (*Shadows*, d. John Cassavetes) in 1959, to the wacky off-Beat *Pull My Daisy* (Alfred Leslie and Robert Frank) in 1960, the cinema-verite approach of *Primary* (Richard Leacock, Donn Pennebaker, Robert Drew, and Albert Maysles) in 1961, and the poetic cinema of Stan Brakhage's *The Dead* and *Prelude* in 1962. The parameters of the New American Cinema had expanded, both politically and aesthetically, but had done so very much along its earlier lines of definition: against the domination of the film industry, they stood for artisan production. Attitudes suited to Eisenhower's Cold War were slightly updated to the optimistic liberalism of the Kennedy years.

The positions assumed by Jonas Mekas during this period provide a representative index of the times. In the 50's Mekas had continued the politics of the heart which he used in the Resistance against Nazi occupation of his native Lithuania during World War 2. His early New York diary films chronicle his pacifist participation in Ban the Bomb demonstrations. By 1964 he had made The brig, a documentary style filming of the Living theatre's production of Kenneth Brown's play about military brutality. there was always a strong current of romanticism motivating such anti-establishment politics (i9 the US a line stretching from Henry David Thoreau to Timothy Leary). for Mekas, as for

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<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>

many artists, this tendency easily metamorphosed into a creed of cultivating one's own garden, an individualism implicit all along in the Age of Aquarius. Indeed, buy 1966 Mekas could write,

We used to march with posters protesting this and protesting that. Today, we realize that to improve the world, the others, first we have to improve ourselves; that only through the beauty of our own selves can we beautify the others.<sup>3</sup>

(ref also John Lennon

This evolution along the lines of individualistic tolerance can also be traced in terms of Mekas' position on homosexuality. In 1955 Mekas wrote a controversial essay on US experimental film (since repudiated by the author) that centered its attack on the "adolescent character" of the films and the "conspiracy of homosexuality" among their makers. In retrospect, Mekas was rather on-target in his assessment of those films' heroes: "ouch with reality seems to be very feeble. Instead of a human being, we find a poetic version of a modern zombie."<sup>4</sup> Mekas faulted these films' symbolist/surrealist unreality, the characters' Dostoevskian inner absorption, the entire work's distance from the concrete world in which people live. In other words, Mekas criticized one dominant tradition of the romantic artist, in this instance ethereal, idealist truth-seeking. He furthermore faulted the work for its homosexual "perversion" and "unmotivated" art of "abnormality."

Nine years later, however, he switched sides, opting for the journey not to the heights, but into the depths, praising such films as Ken Jacobs' and bob Fleischner's *Blond Cobra* and Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief*. Mekas claimed that these films, and others of their genre, raised the supreme challenge to ossified bourgeois culture and morality via their homosexual subject matter and/or deliberately crude style. He brought Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, a classic of polymorphous eroticism, to the Knokke-Heist experimental film festival in 1963, where he championed its beauty against the censorship of Belgian officials (although he referred disparagingly to "the fags who were swamping the fest" and bothering his friend Paul Adams Sitney).<sup>5</sup> Mekas held apparently opposing views in fragile equilibrium, bound together only by the notion of the artist standing above society with his vision as a challenge to it.

The early gay films of the 50s and 60s, both disparaged and praised by Mekas, can be seen in another light. In the dark years between the McCarthy-style derailment of the first US lesbian and gay movement and its renaissance after Stonewall in 1969, these films, together with their literary analogue, the Beat movement, constituted the only visible glimmer of the pervasive gay subculture testified to by Kinsey, and the only hints of the movement that was to follow in the 70s. This visibility alone was a kind of militancy in the context of the period. Likewise, the commitment of Amos Vogel and others (Grove Press, Lenny Bruce, Evergreen Review, even Playboy) to the breaking of

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<sup>3</sup>

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sexual taboos was progressive within the struggle against Puritanism, censorship, and threats to free speech. It was a period of contradictions, with court cases and jailings, the birth control pill and sexual liberation. In Chicago, for example, the center Cinema Co-op grew out of the Aardvark Theater, which showed a mix of experimental films and commercial porn. the limitations of such a politics became more apparent once its victories of free expression were won, and the emergence of the women's movement proved how different (and overlapping) sexual liberation and women's liberation were. though many filmmakers and their supporters held up the breaking of sexual taboos as an artistic banner throughout the 60s, the fervor for the forbidden, once one, abated, leaving behind the artistic romanticism that always rested at its foundation.

On the West Coast, meanwhile, a more Rousseauian romanticism was flourishing. James Broughton celebrated sexual innocence in films of lyric love in the 50s and more explicit eroticism in the 60s. with San Francisco as the center of the booming counter-culture, independent filmmaking turned psychedelic, while the freedom of the drug vision was expressed increasingly as a loosening of sexual restraints. Consider this typical description from the 1967 Canyon cinema catalogue: "The Psychedelics: abstractions of reality using psychedelic patterns projected onto nude female bodies." not all California filmmaking was psychedelic. There was also an attention to social satire, particularly in the work of Bruce Conner and Robert Nelson. Conner assembled found footage into dark comedies of society viewed askew, as in report, which exposed the Kennedy assassination as a media event. In 1965, nelson's *o dem watermelons* (a counter-culture remake of *entr'acte*) accompanied the San Francisco Mime Troupe on its pro-civil rights tour of the country, making it probably one of the most politically effective experimental films of the time. It was a limited politics. Screenings today require an explanation of how its whacky slapstick against watermelons actually could symbolize American racism.

Some avant garde filmmakers were able to make effective political films in the mid-60s by functioning as chroniclers, in their own style , of political events: for example, Bruce Baillie's *Port Chicago Vigil* (1966), a diary film of a demonstration against the shipping of napalm to Vietnam. Or in 1967, in New York, the Week of Angry Arts got a number of artists and galleries to hold a sort of moratorium in which artist dedicated work to the anti-war effort (thought the individual work was not necessarily overtly political). Some 60 filmmakers participated in shooting one to three minute films for the occasion, resulting in a mammoth 3 hour compilation film, *For Life, Against the War*, with contributions by artists such as Mekas, Stan Brakhage, Ken Jacobs, Robert Breer, and Shirley Clarke. The majority of work produced during this period was anti-establishment, in film as in the other arts, though there was an already growing rift between the avant garde and left-political camps.

During the late 50sw and early 60s, film culture included overt political discussions as a regular part of its film coverage, just as the new American cinema movement included a number of political numbers in its membership. While the avant garde and political people shared a common enemy, they shared no common perspective or strategy. Relations became strained during the 60s as the political filmmakers saw art as

instrumental--using films to raise money, provide resources for organized social and political organizations, or as they objected to the personalities of the dominant avant garde figures. The split widened rapidly at the end of the decade.

## IN THE STREETS/IN THE GALLERIES

Add somewhere--WWBM

New developments were brewing that would leave underground film in a centrist position. On the one hand the increase of anti-war activity, the student movement, and the emergence of a militant Black Power movement would lead to a new engaged cinema, and on the other hand the experimental cinema moved closer to the modernist visual arts for its models, leading to a new “structural” cinema.

In 1967 the Pentagon demonstration marked the end of nonviolence as the leading tactic in the antiwar movement and brought together a new group of committed documentaries, who then formed Newsreel, the New Left filmmaking and distribution-exhibition group that flourished in New York and other cities for several years.<sup>6</sup> Seeing themselves basically in an agitation and informational role, they were open to and influenced by fresh strategies such as the work of Cuba's Santiago Alvarez. As with Alvarez and many other Third World radical filmmakers, the combination of limited resources, political enthusiasm, desire to communicate about topical issues, and eager audiences lead to films still notable for their vigor, immediacy, and fresh vision. In addition, a heavily Yippie influence<sup>7</sup> in the early months of Newsreel made it open to a wide variety of artistic experimentation--an impulse reinforced by the accomplished editing style of Allan Siegel. It was a time when almost every news report mentioned new fighting in Vietnam, and new resistance at home--ghetto rebellions, farm worker's unionizing, draft resistance, student activism, and many other expressions of change. It was a time when rock music appeared progressive by its very nature, and the counter-culture seemed to make everyone under 30 years old political by definition.

As Newsreel responded to events “in the streets,” the avant garde responded to events “in the galleries.” Annette Michelson set the terms of this new position in “Film and the Radical Aspiration” (1966) which began pessimistically:\

The history of Cinema is, like that of Revolution in our time, a chronicle of hopes and expectations, aroused and suspended, tested and deceived.<sup>8</sup>

Michelson consistently perceived radical formalism as the only possible political and aesthetic stance for filmmakers. Indeed, in summing up the status quo later in the article, she wrote:

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<sup>6</sup> Nichols

<sup>7</sup> define yippie

<sup>8</sup> Michelson

In a country whose power and affluence are maintained by the dialectic of a war economy, in a country whose drama of revolution has been sublimated in reforms, and frustrated by an equivocal prosperity, cinematic radicalism is condemned to a politics and strategy of social and aesthetic subversion.<sup>9</sup>

Thus independent film turns from the material process of life to the materiality of cinema, films investigation of its own filmic properties (grain, strobe effect, focus, etc.). Andy Warhol--a successful Pop Art painter and celebrity turned filmmaker--marked a turning point when he received the 1964 Film Culture award for his minimalist films *Sleep*, *Kiss*, *Eat*, *Haircut*, and *Empire*. While Warhol's early work parallels the filmic tradition of breaking taboos, his recognition by Film culture is for a new phase of his work which can be seen to usher in a new style of filmmaking derived less from Pop and mass art and more from the minimalist phase beginning to be heralded by critics and avant garde galleries. the post-modernist canons of he art world at this time (with emphasis on process art, minimalism, performance, and conceptual art) exercise a powerful influence on this generation of filmmakers: for example, Tony Conrad, *The Flicker*, 1966, Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967, Ken Jacobs, *Tom, tom, The Piper's Son*, 1969.

### The Seventies Orthodoxy

In 1970 Gene Youngblood's book, *Expanded Cinema*, promised an Aquarian democratization of the media, expanding from the West Coast to topple the exclusive media hierarchies nationwide not with just new forms, but whole new technologies: video, computers, generational systems, lasers and other exotic hardwares. AS it turned out, the promise wasn't kept.

Once again New York city is the cultural point of origin (as it had been for film in the Beat era and with the publication of P. Adams Sitney's "Structural Film" essay (1969) its structural filmmakers became the new orthodoxy, serviced by a new cultural establishment.

The consolidation of the decade began with the opening, in 1970, of the Anthology Film Archives, founded by five men (including Mekas and Sitney), funded by their friend Jerome Hill, and structured to accommodate only the work of their own taste--even to the extent of the famous "invisible cinema," which made only a certain kind of film look good.<sup>10</sup> they developed critical power: Mekas continued his persuasive Village Voice columns, he and Sitney continued to publish *Film Culture*, and Michelson was by now the film and performance editor of *Artforum*, the leading publication on new art, as well as editor of film books for Praeger, a major intellectual press. both Michelson and Sitney were teaching at New York University, where in their classes the Anthology collection was the standard of excellence. Sitney's *Visionary Film* (1974) remains the most scholarly and therefore most influential book on avant garde cinema. Its concluding chapter, while more critical towards its subject than the historical chapters, effectively canonized its ultimate hierarchy of Snow, Sharits, Landow, Frampton, and Gehr. NYU

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trained students further immortalized the same hierarchy in their critical essays commissioned for the Whitney Museum's *History of the American Avant-grade Cinema* catalogue, which was attacked upon its publication in 1976 by Vogel and others precisely for replicating this same narrow range.

Anthology and the New York University Press formalized this partnership with the publication of a series of books, notably Sitney's anthology on Anthology, *The Essential Cinema* (1975) which collected essays on, again, the films in the collection. In the area of exhibition, the chosen filmmakers fame was spread throughout the US by a new 70s network of Regional Film centers mandated to devote a portion of their programming to the New American Cinema. with reputations thus buoyed by publication and exhibition, most of these filmmakers secured positions in the numerous filmmaking departments organized in art schools and universities during the 1970s. Exhibitions abroad, like Michelson's 1974 Montreaux festival (which widened the spectrum to include Yvonne Rainer), and acquisitions, like the Pompidou Center's purchase of the entire Anthology collection of titles, have carried this orthodox legacy beyond the US borders. Thus the brave young challengers whose quest to break way and defy authority opened the decade of the 60s have, by the end of the 1970s became the comfortable establishment, themselves susceptible to a new challenge.<sup>11</sup>

As the 70s witnessed the playing out of many traditions begun in the 60s, they have also seen the emergence of a totally new cinematic movements, particularly in films inspired by the feminist movement and minority struggles. within the established avant garde in the 70s three parallel developments were seen. One trend was "more of the same": the continuing work of the new American Cinema and structuralist filmmakers essentially along the same lines established in the 60s as well as a generation of younger filmmakers--often their students--following their lead.

A second trend, sometimes originating with the first, was a new academicism which exemplifies its self-referential aspect by examining not merely the materiality of film but all the material of the film/art world, with films that end up quoting from other avant garde films, filmmakers, and critics. There is a consequent upping of the ante in terms of those who can understand the work, frequently requiring an intimate knowledge of past films in order to catch the quotes. For example, George Landow's *Wide Angle Saxon* makes a number of witty jokes with punch lines depending on you recognition of some half-dozen major works of avant garde cinema. His later *New Improved Institutional Quality* depends both on your knowledge of its namesake and a passing acquaintance with the genre categories in *Visionary Film*. In Michael Snow's *Rameau's Nephew* a recognition of who the various actors are (the cast includes Michelson, Sitney, and video artist Nam June Paik) and a knowledge of their positions in the art/film world are both necessary for an appreciation of the film's fundamental ironies. In Jim Benning's *Grand Opera* an even greater background is required: the identification of four filmmakers, their pseudonyms and their styles, one filmmaker's voice, and several past works by Benning are all compulsory if the film is to make any sense. These works seem to demand a cadre of professional explainers--sometime the filmmaker through statements or interviews, but

often a generation of younger critics whose program notes, reviews in the art press and essays in *Film Culture* and *Millennium* deciphered the cinematic hieroglyphics and in-group jokes.

Whereas in the late 50s a general sympathy with bohemian ideas and ideals granted an access to avant garde films (via jazz, little magazine literature, life styles, etc.), by the late 60s the structuralist films depended on an audience schooled in specific art world concerns. The virtue of this style was its ability to compress and condense theoretical points, with, etc., to provide an added tension to its narrowing of target. Now, the new academicism of the late 70s depends on a knowledge of key avant garde films and celebrities. Thus a trajectory can be traced along a rate of decreasing accessibility, reducing the early avant garde promise of democratization down to a very intimate privileged inner circle. As Stan Brakhage once remarked regarding structural films, one problem with them was that they were so easy to fake. that is, once you know the formula you can turn them out without exploring further.

In a parallel, but not unrelated development, a number of filmmakers have returned to investigating narrative concerns and techniques using trained actors, synch sound, recognizable plots, and impressive sets. While some of these narrative filmmakers will be discussed elsewhere below, Mark Rapaport is perhaps the best example of someone wholly--and early on--committed to the New Narrative, with 5 feature films produced during the 70s. He represents the high class style of the New Narrative, while the cruder beginnings of the form back in the mid-60s are now being revived by a new generation of post -punk filmmakers based, once again, in New York.

The notion of an avant garde cinema which is both formally and politically radical is based in an idealist sentiment in the US--a wishful hypothesis rather lacking in illustration, for reasons which should be clear by the end of this article. The few filmmakers committed to this area remain isolated cases, often taken up in Europe where the model has more of a history and constituency, but still an aberration from both the political and avant garde mainstreams of the US in the 80s.

However, the culture wars of the 80s did have some impact, as established avant gardists became politicized by events, esp. government attacks on artistic expression in terms of funding issues of NEA and NEH. (Bolton)

Some individuals established themselves first in traditional avant garde terms before making films with a heavy political influence: Jon Jost, Canadian Joyce Weiland, English emigré Anthony McCall (working in the lat 70s with Andrew Tyndall, and then a collective). Weiland, who worked in New York before returning to Canada (as did Snow), maintained her structuralist origins in *Rat Life and diet in North America* (1968), a comic evocation of Canadian nationalism, while *Pierre Vallières* (1972) presents a single shot, synch sound extreme close up of the québecquois separatist leader's lips giving a militant speech, and *Solidarity* (1973) a visual record of mass labor rally (heard on the sound track) showing only the feet of the demonstrators. Later she turned from avant garde strategies and moved into the traditional feature form for exploring

nationalist history through stylized domestic melodrama in *The Far shore* (1976). Jost, the most Godardian US filmmaker in the 70s and 80s, explores the situations and dilemmas of the counterculture and the left (1,2,3,4 and the autobiographical *Speaking directly*). Committed to his own version of low budget feature length films, his more recent work haws used narrative and reworking of genre conventions.

Anthony McCall has moved from installation art to formalist exploration of the cinematic apparatus with his Cone Series, which, following in the footsteps of Wavelength took the ultimate avant garde showcase, Belgium's Knokke festival, by storm in 74-75.

Subsequently, in collaboration with Brit graphic designer Andrew Tyndall, McCall produced the resolutely didactic *Arguments* (197 ) which they see as a “theoretical intervention” into the reigning mindset of the New :York art world, but which contradicts in its effect, its own intentions when it embraces authoritarian intellectual terrorism as an aesthetic strategy. later the pair joined Jane Weinstocks and .....to produce the highly theoretical *Sigmund Freud's Dora*, an examination and deconstruction of the famous case study from a post-=structuralist perspective.

In the early 70s Yvonne Rainer completed *Journeys From Berlin/1971* which offers a synthesis encompassing autobiography, psychoanalysis, domestic conversation, and a discussion of terrorism, through a variety of formal strategies. While holding to a commitment to and expansion of formal style (including fixed camera, narrative displacements, irony, stream of consciousness progressions, etc.) and to move beyond simple ambiguity, Rainer offered an example of how avant garde film could move into a new and potentially fruitful area. At the same time, Rainer's early films often seem deeply embedded in art world “ways of seeing” and “ways of presenting” subject matter with political themes, thus virtually demanding an audience steeped in these ways of perceiving and ways of receiving to get the full effect.

The exception that proves the rules of the game; the token as breakthrough

One notion that developed in the 1970s was the supposed breakthrough of leftists into feature documentary, and more recently the fiction category that can win exposure though certain film festivals and can lay short runs in art house theaters in select urban areas or college towns. Indeed there has long been a market for one or two feature documentaries each year in the US exhibition pattern. Starting with Emile de Antonio's *Point of Order* (on Senator Joe McCarthy), *In the Year of the Pig* (Vietnam), *Millhouse* (Richard Nixon), etc. and with Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* that space was opened up for independents and remained open, at the same level, ever since. The documentaries that fill the slot may be of any type--apolitical, like *Pumping Iron* (bodybuilding), silent in avoiding politics like *Gimme Shelter* (on the Rolling Stones tour that included the Altamont concert where Hell's Angels killed a spectator, muckraking-exploitive like *Marjoe* (biopic of a cynical revivalist preacher) or dealing with a political subject in a nonpolitical way, like *Idi Amin Dada* (a sensationalist portrait of the \_\_\_\_\_ dictator). But in the 1970s these became a bonus slot for progressive filmmakers with promotional know-how. Sometimes these films were self-distributed and self-promoted such as Jerry Bruck's *I. F. Stone* (on the dissident left journalist), Jill Godmillow's

Antonia (on a pioneering female musical conductor excluded from prestige by classical music sexism), the Mariposa Collective's *Word is Out* (on gay and lesbian presence). Occasionally a film can use festival success to transfer at this stage to a major distributor, such as Barbara Kopple with *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, (on Kentucky miners on strike) thereby attaining commercial theater exposure without the personal burden of crossing the country via the local talk-show circuit to build an audience

**SCMS dossier for Pedagogy Award** (an edited version)

Chuck Kleinhans

**One. C.V. for Pedagogy** (full c.v. online)**Two. Course innovations**

Here I highlight some, but not all, the course innovations I introduced in the past 30 years.

**Theory & Practice.** Because I have worked as a media scholar/critic and as a creative media maker, much of my teaching ranging from introductory courses for majors and non-majors to advanced graduate seminars has involved theory/studies and practice/creative work. Part of this is the hallmark of my department. For example, MFAs are required to take graduate studies courses, and PhDs are required to learn at least introductory production. Both kinds of inquiry can be used in many courses.

**INTRO**

- introductory production courses for RTF majors (designed with Citron and Seiter): integrated cultural analysis with media making; developed extensive teaching materials (handouts, slides, sample clips, etc.) used by all faculty and TAs who taught the courses; required S8mm location documentary (group projects) in Chicago to get students into a different world.
- introductory studies/production courses for non-majors (initially for Ford Foundation Integrated Arts initiative; later evolution into department Media Literacy course). Pioneered use of university Mac computer labs for teaching intro media skills (later integrated into all RTF intro courses).
- developed large lecture/TA discussion Intro to Popular Culture based around music from folk to vernacular to pop/commercial, etc. using blues, R&B, Appalachian folk, country, bluegrass, rock, hip-hop and rap, bhangra, disco, house, electronica, etc. and ranging through history of recorded music, music in radio history, interrelation of sound recording, broadcasting, film, etc.

**ADVANCED UNDERGRAD/GRAD**

- team taught large lecture class for RTF and Theatre with Susan Lee (Dance) on musical comedy films combining film analysis and dance/choreography analysis (and demonstrations by Lee)
- team taught Third World Film with Manjunath Pendakur (RTF) combining aesthetic and political economy analysis. resulted in conference presentations and article: with Manji Pendakur, "Learning Together: Team Teaching a Course on Third World Film from a Shared Marxist Perspective, *Jump Cut* no. 33 (March 88), pp. 82-90.  
<<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC33folder/MxtFilmStudy.html>>
- At NU: first faculty taught course on feminism and film (1977); first course on film melodrama and soap opera (1980); first course on stars (1980); first course on Cuban film (1980); first course on African American film (1984); first course on reality TV (1996).
- In response to Provost and Dean's request for "capstone" courses for seniors developed Hollywood in the Nineties combining aesthetic/cinematic, industrial/economic/institutional, and cultural analysis of one decade. Under enrollment pressures it evolved into a large undergrad class; also taught as grad course for the MA in Liberal Arts program.
- My most frequently taught undergrad classes have been History and Criticism of Experimental Film and Contemporary Experimental Film and Video. In both courses students are required to

do field work by visiting 5 events in Chicago's media artworld and write reports. In addition to individual works the course deals with the institutional basis for the experimental art world and this makes the experience concrete, present, and memorable and gets them out of NU's suburban cocoon.

### **GRADUATE**

- various graduate courses specifically designed for RTF MFA and PhD students in the same classroom with PhDs required to do some appropriate production and MFAs to write critical essays. (Syllabus for D26/526 Cross Cultural Media in this dossier). This included Theory and Practice team taught with Dana Hodgdon (structuralism; commercials) and also Michelle Citron (personal/autobiography) and later solo Theory and Practice courses ( e.g. Light/Color/Composition; Found Sound and Recycled Images; Digital Interactive Environment; Word/Screen/Motion)
- Graduate seminar courses specifically designed to work with and serve our adjoining programs (PhD in Performance Studies; PhD in Theatre and Drama) and attract students from comparative literature, national language and literatures, sociology, comm studies, etc.: Film Melodrama, Action Film, Realism and Naturalism, Theory of Comedy, Well Made Play and Classical Hollywood Film, Russian Formalism and Soviet Silent Film, Brecht and Film, Jameson and Film, Bourdieu, Textual Analysis, Visual Culture. The Cross Cultural course also serves Performance Studies (which has a strong ethnographic direction), Latin American studies, Anthropology, Sociology, comparative literature.
- Graduate class on Sexual Representation. Article included in this dossier. "Teaching Sexual Images: Some Pragmatics," *Jump Cut* no. 40 (March, 1996), pp. 119-122  
<<http://www.ejmpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC40folder/TeachPornPragmatics.html>>

### **Three. Publications on Pedagogy.**

### **Four: Service: Pedagogy (selected)**

### **Five. Supplementary**

A significant amount of my professional work involves curating film/video events which are usually exhibited to the general public in museum, gallery, and other venues. These are often linked to college and universities, but invite an audience that is specifically outside of the disciplinary and professional field of media studies. Similarly, I often speak to such general audiences introducing and discussing creative work, media issues, and so forth. My creative work has been exhibited in a similar way to a more general audience. A full listing of these events can be found on my personal web site.

From the start in 1974, JUMP CUT has been committed to working with new and emerging writers, as well as people outside of media studies proper. This has been especially so in relation to topic areas and issues we were among the first to develop: feminist, gay/lesbian/queer, race/ethnic, and class analysis and the study of Third World film, new theoretical developments, sexual representation, documentary film, activist media, etc. There is an important teaching function in finding and working with writers to help them develop their analysis and skill in expression. Full access to all the back issues of JUMP CUT is found at our web site: [www.ejmpcut.org](http://www.ejmpcut.org).

**Six. Nominator's statement** (Jyotsna Kapur). [Extensively quoted from letters of support.]

**Seven. Syllabus:** RTF 426 Cross Cultural Analysis

### **Eight. Successful Assignments**

I discussed some of this above under curriculum, and some examples are in the syllabus for 526 and the article on teaching sexual representation. A brief example of what I aim for in assignments would be this from a graduate course on Realism. I had the students come to my apartment to shoot a short film called "Serving Suggestion." They had to bring a packaged food which had a picture of the product/meal on the container with the disclaimer "serving suggestion." We prepared the foods (and ate them after the shoot) and then each was recorded with a slow pan over from the advertised presentation to the actual product. The blueberry blintzes were especially memorable, looking like a plate of tumors. The exercise was fun and also gave us all a chance to compare and contrast mediated image with consumable reality as well as to reflect on Bazin's argument for the privileged realism of the sequence shot.

My film theory courses have always included close analysis of scenes as a way of having students first see how complex moving images and sound films and tapes are, and how they raise questions for analysis. Then, the tools of semiotics, close textual analysis, visual studies, psychoanalysis, feminism, and so forth can be seen as possible ways of investigating. I often describe film theory as a "desperate attempt to catch up with film practice." This not only validates the MFAs in the class, but also encourages, by the end of the course, seeing theory as a practice that should be useful, and which can be tested, rather than just taken as a set of ex cathedra truths or dictums. One such close analysis of the MGM musical *Lady Be Good* resulted in an SCMS panel on the film and subsequent publication of articles in JUMP CUT by Jane Gaines, Scott Brewer, and myself. (available online at [www.ejmpcut.org](http://www.ejmpcut.org), issue 31, 1986).

In the undergrad intro classes an always successful assignment which was adapted to still photography, video, super 8mm, websites, and computer graphics was to describe yourself without presenting an image of yourself. In one memorable project, an undergrad created a web site that featured all of her ex-boyfriends with a detailed (comic) list of their faults and why she broke up with them. Portraits of others and autobiographical/diary projects have also worked well. In the Media Literacy course groups that ran throughout the course produced final projects fusing critical analysis and audio-visual presentation such as a detailed analysis of the Disney animation narrative formula. A similar assignment in my recent Hong Kong cinema course created groups fusing RTF majors with Asian Studies students to study the cultural basis for film genres, each group contributing their expertise to the final reports.

For graduate courses on cultural analysis, I devised an exercise in which certain classes are designated as "fashion statement" days and students have to do a catwalk and explain the cultural meaning of their apparel. The first time is pretty mundane, but by the end some folks use it to act out and act up: club clothes, a Ringling Bros. clown, an EMS medic, cross-dressing, sexy lingerie, full Goth tattoos, sari and bangles, etc. have all appeared. In any case, it trains people in learning to read cultural clues that are otherwise, taken-for-granted, that is ideological. For a course highlighting cultural consumption, ethnographic location visits included Chinatown, Petco (pet supply store), Megamall (Latin American stalls), tattoo parlor, etc. as a way of understanding how cultural differences shape different consumption patterns. Various syllabi posted on my personal web site.

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/gatewaypages/kleinhansfolder/kleinhans.html>

## Nine. Support letters from colleagues and former students

### Ten. Student scholarship and production

It is hard to specify this area. Perhaps two recent undergrad examples will suffice.

As an advisor on my junior year independent study and senior thesis—both of which focused on World War II military training film—Chuck proved to be an amazing asset, providing me with excellent feedback, scholarly resources, and support throughout my writing process. In my independent study, Chuck helped focus my research and ideas down from the U.S. military’s entire output of training films during World War II (an enormous collection of films) to those training films that dealt specifically with venereal disease. My independent study culminated in my paper “World War II VD Training Films: Disease, Culture, and American Wartime Culture,” which won Northwestern’s George C. Casey Prize for the Best Undergraduate Essay on a Topic Related to Gender. Through Chuck’s mentorship, I was also able to present at *Film & History*’s 2004 conference on “War in Film, Television, and History.” (support letter from Eric Hoyt)

Arturo Menchaca developed a creative project on the physics of perception with an independent study after taking my Experimental Film course and also designed a very successful quarter long series with the Block Cinema on structural film, a remarkably ambitious series which included guests speakers Tom Gunning, Fred Camper, Mark Kerins, Brian Price, Bruce Jenkins, and others.

Chuck’s wisdom had suddenly opened a door for me. I truly began to “get” experimental films, and not only enjoyed watching them, but wanted to make my own. So I continued to pursue my newfound interest outside of class, and Chuck actively cultivated my growing interest in theorizing about and creating experimental films....In 2005 he supported my application for the Undergraduate Research Grant, which I was subsequently awarded, and then served as my mentor for the grant. My project consisted of making a series of short “structural” films and Chuck offered valuable insight, both because he was quite familiar with the structural tradition and because he was well-aware of how my personal interests and tastes had developed during the course of the school year. His suggestions led me to rethink my creative processes, ultimately making me a better filmmaker.

In the spring of 2006, with the knowledge gained from Chuck’s classes, as well as his own personal encouragement and support, I was able to realize perhaps my most significant accomplishment to date: curating *A Cinema of Physics and Perception*, a quarter-long experimental film series at Northwestern’s Block Cinema. Chuck gave me crucial advice when it came to programming the series and kindly agreed to write an essay that was included alongside my own in the series pamphlet.

I could not have been happier with the way the series turned out, and can safely say that I never would have even conceptualized the series if it had not been for Chuck sharing his wisdom with me over the past two years. With his characteristic sense of humor and a genuine concern for my edification, Chuck showed me that one can at once be a serious scholar and a wide-eyed child when watching and creating films, and that the intellectual and experiential components should never outweigh one another. In doing so, he forever altered the way I understand and create films. I count him as the most significant professor of my educational career.

Over the years, many MFA students have included work that began in my courses in their final portfolio. Some of my PhD students have made creative work which has been exhibited, such as Chad Raphael (now teaching at Santa Clara University) whose portrait of an immigrant campus food service worker detailed her life between Mexico and the US. I directed the dissertations of these students who have all maintained an active media production since getting their PhDs: Hyunsoek Seo, Jeffrey Skoller, Ellen Seiter, Carole Harmel, Blaine Allan, Elizabeth K. Jackson, Tulin Yilbar-Sertoz, Virginia Keller, Toni Perrine, Chris List, Ilene Goldman, Gabriel Gomez, Eilish McCormick, David Douglas. [details on request]

Almost all of my PhD students presented conference papers and published articles that came out of my classes and/or the dissertation. For some the dissertation evolved directly into a book: Straayer, Doll, Curry, Perrine, List, Kapur, Martin, Skoller.

### **Media-centered extra-curricular involvement with students**

Various examples are listed on my personal website c.v. ranging from introducing and speaking for student organized programs (Gay-Lesbian Alliance, women's films, Gender Studies), faculty advising the Block Cinema student program committee, Faculty Advisor, WNUR, 1984-1990. [7200 watt FM station broadcasts "New Music" format to most of greater Chicago area]

**Eleven. List of dissertations directed** (at the time 41 completed; 4 in progress) and MFA committees (directed—5-- and served on--22)

### **Twelve. Essay on pedagogy.**

"Teaching Sexual Images: Some Pragmatics," *Jump Cut* no. 40 (March, 1996), pp. 119-122  
<<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC40folder/TeachPornPragmatics.html>>

# A PHILOSOPHY AND PRAGMATICS OF WRITING

CHUCK KLEINHANS, 2012

## WHY WRITE?

To communicate to a larger group  
To have peer review  
To explain one's research, ideas

From student work (to one person—for a professor) to professional (a group of people—many of whom are not like you and your friends)

Basic expository prose (how to)  
Varies somewhat by discipline, national culture, generation, etc.

Understanding your audience  
From conference paper to publishable article  
Sharing and critiquing your ideas  
--false concept—ideas as property  
developing ideas in teaching  
finding specialist peers  
conferences  
correspondence

Non-specialist peers  
where you are geographically  
building and maintaining an intellectual/political network

false standards  
career needs  
practical needs  
intellectual goals

intellectual vs. academic  
“refereed journals”—journal ranking, quantification  
blind refereed: plus and minus  
why  
citation indexes  
internet publication

prejudice against media, popular culture  
political prejudices

## AS AN ACADEMIC, PRESTIGE IS PRESTIGE IN SPECIALTY, NOT AT INSTITUTION

Career and/vs. intellectual integrity

- find out the norms where you are
- re-educate people who will judge you
- if in an unorthodox situation, get it in writing, early on
- consciously promote yourself in a sincere (not cynical) way

Additional ideas:

- the importance of visual support in conference and publication presentation
- purchase the tools to do this
- make it part of your overhead
- keeping up with what's going on vs. trendiness
- “don't [bleep] where you eat”

## HOW TO PUBLISH (MECHANICS)

### 1. survey the field

- library (examine periodicals in your field and related field at major research libraries)
- Bookstores (visit major academic bookstores in large cities, trade book stores, Amazon.com, etc.)
- Ads (Chronicle of Higher Ed, publications in your field, other fields)
- Notices, calls for papers (Cinema Journal, websites, listservs, etc.)
- Information at professional meetings
- Contacts

2. Look for non-media specialty publications
  - liberal arts quarterlies
  - area studies, national orientation
  - topic publications (areas, identities, etc.)
  - general arts publications

### 3 Preparation---KNOW THE PUBLICATION

- send clean copies
- carefully proofread
- check style sheet—be absolutely accurate
- modest cover letter—your expertise<sup>i</sup>
- return postage/envelope if needed and/or online submission
- return receipt/postcard
- have a backup list for rejection (play the %)

Follow up inquiry—email, letter or phone (always be factual, non emotional—sarcasm is totally inappropriate, but don't be a wimp either.

When rejected:

- a. Never get into a fight
- b. If misunderstood,
  - a. it may be you were not clear,
  - b. it may be a form of rejection
- c. readers reports—not worth a quarrel

If you have a chance, meet the editor

#### **If revise, revise and resubmit—**

Phone and get a clear signal

Revise—follow the suggestions, but keep it your own piece (intellectual integrity)  
 --you can ignore the minor things you disagree with (but check with several other people)  
 --return the reworked ms. With a note about *major* disagreement  
 in general, try to work it out in a business like, professional way.

**Rule: You can never win a fight with an editor, don't try**

Delays, double submissions, etc.

Delays in publication are frequent—get a letter (in writing) for employer if you need to show acceptance and intent to publish

Multiple submissions

- in journalism/reviewing—commonplace to submit on speculation (especially on topical material (but try to set up in advance)
- academic—usually forbidden

#### **Rule: Always keep an editor informed of any changes in intent/activity**

Withdrawal.

1. if problems, try to do it over the phone
2. may well close out future possibilities with the publication aside—editors have a grape vine aside—inexperienced editors often make mistakes, esp. academics.

Commissioned work (e.g. book review; festival or conference report, etc.)

Be clear about length

Be clear about deadline

Send sample, state expertise

Festival, conference reports, etc.—get commitment to publish in advance  
 Be clear about style and subjectivity

Interviews

- a. interviews are a form of PR
  - a. all directors give the same interview (except Godard)
- b. be wary of "exclusives"
- c. know your publication in advance, get a commitment if at all possible
- d. interviews do little for your career unless you do a lot and become famous for doing them (e.g., Scott MacDonald for avant garde cinema).
  - a. Credit goes to the interviewee
  - b. Translation—a tough call; make sure you want to do it.

After publication, self-promotion is essential. Offprints, copies, etc. This is part of your overhead, send them out with notes.

Copyright and reprint agreement

**Another large topic: the changing nature of publishing, e-books and journals.**

i Explain why you are an expert on this subject (e.g., part of your dissertation, or course work in the area, or special fieldwork, etc.)

## Documentary and Naturalism

Naturalism--an artistic movement, especially in literature and drama, extending from 19th Century realism, which stressed the extensive and detailed depiction of reality. One notable figure is Emile Zola, the novelist, who wrote a polemical article, *The Experimental Novel*, in which he argued the task of the novelist was to carefully set the scene and explain the details of a situation and then set the events in motion. What was radical and new in this approach was that it countered the artificial and theatrical tendencies of art. Against artifice in technique or spiritual themes, it stood for a straight-on look at the everyday.

Zola's novels are often involved with social protests against unjust and oppressive conditions faced by very ordinary people. **Germinal** depicts the oppressive situation of miners and their eventual revolt. **L'Assommoir** shows the decline of a worker's family as alcoholism destroys lives. **Nana** deals with the life of an actress/prostitute. Naturalism in the theatre often dealt with similar issues. Hauptman's **The Weavers** presents the awful conditions of weavers in Silesia and their oppression. The naturalist stage was famous for being "real"--for example, the great French stage director Antoine created a great stir when a play with a scene in a butcher shop included a real side of beef on the set. Rather than painted backdrops, realist/naturalist staging emphasized using real props, furniture, etc. and stressing theatrical illusion not for a heightened effect but for a believable one.

Under the influence of the science of his day, Zola believed in "scientific" determinism--that heredity and environment cause human behavior. American novelist Frank Norris carried this idea furthest in his novel **Greed**.

Naturalism has always been attacked by conservatives and traditionalists because it seems to present humans as essentially animals without free will (often signaled by "unhealthy" concern with sex and depictions of sexual activities). But it has also been criticized by some leftists, who find it pessimistic...often naturalist novels and plays end in defeat for the oppressed.

Photography and film obviously have great affinities for naturalism. Depiction of the everyday, "warts and all," is even more startling in visual/audio terms than in prose. The questions that perennially appear in extreme documentary realism center around its appeal and its effects. Is a naturalistic look at the "lower depths" (the title of a famous Gorki play) a form of protest against unjust conditions, or is it a voyeuristic and sensational presentation of the unhealthy parts of society? Does it call for change (perhaps implicitly) by showing things that middle class people like to hide or ignore (the classic suburban solution--the Toilet Principle--flush it, get away from it, don't look at it)? Or does it run counter to change by showing that people are just victims and that things will end in defeat? Does it appeal to our base instincts? to our voyeuristic tendency to want to see the forbidden?

# Online experimental

There is today a fairly generous amount of experimental work available online in vastly uneven formats. On the one hand amateur enthusiasts place some materials up in streaming formats which disappear quickly because of copyright or content problems (often sexual censorship). These are often the most likely to be exceptionally poor versions of the original: blurry, out of focus, partial, etc. Some examples: a version of Michael Snow's famous *Wavelength*, that starts at about the halfway point of the 45 min film, and which is badly out of focus, can't give you any good feel for the original. However, if you've never seen it as a print (Snow does not allow video copies of his films), it might be useful as a kind of "note" to get some sense of what critics are talking about. Similarly, Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* is available in a truncated version which is atrociously bad. The effect of the original depends on seeing it as a high resolution image.

On the other hand, some artists have chosen to put their work up in some form online, and one of the best sites is UbuWeb, which respects the intentions of the artists and makes available the best possible versions in online form (which they admit is a deteriorated quality).

In contrast, YouTube and similar outfits, often have posted items which are partial, mislabelled, fragmentary, and erroneously attributed. So, beware and try to check the authenticity of what you find there.

What to do? First, try to ascertain if what you are seeing is actually close to the original artist's intentions for the work, and what limits the online format has for viewing. As much as we might be moving to a time when many people see no difference between a 70mm theatrical presentation of the original *Star Wars*, say, and having a scene on their iPhone, the original makers certainly did think that the aesthetic and material characteristics of film were essential to what effect the final work would have in screening. Second, don't make any definitive statements, judgments, or evaluations, about the work you've seen online until you can see the original (or at least a quality DVD version of it).

**UbuWeb:** The YouTube of the Avant-Garde UbuWeb has converted all of its rare and out-of-print film & video holdings to on-demand streaming formats à la YouTube, which means that you can view everything right in your browser without platform-specific software or insanely huge downloads. We offer over 300

films & videos from artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Vito Acconci, Pipilotti Rist, Jean Genet, The Cinema of Transgression, Richard Foreman, Terayama Shuji, Paul McCarthy Jack Smith, Carolee Schneeman, John Lennon and hundreds more -- of course all free of charge. Presented in conjunction with our partners at Greylodge.

**A Short (and remarkably lopsided to the U.K.) history of experimental film:**  
<http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/index.html>

## Animation

**John Whitney,**

*Catalog* 1961

Youtube

*Arabesques*, 1975

The Whitneys and Jordan Belson pioneered early (analog) computer graphic animation. Very little of their work is available online.

**Oskar Fischinger**

Various works of this pioneer of artistic animation are available online in uneven forms and titles. If you are interested in his work, use the library Media Center.

**Robert Breer, (animation)**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/breer.html>

*A Man and his Dog out for Air*

*69*

*Swiss Army Knife with Rats and Pigeons*

*LMNO*

*Fuji*

**Ed Emschwiller**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/emshwiller.html>

*Sunstone*

*Thanatopsis*

Emschwiller pioneered digital computer animation

**Paul Glabicki**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/glabicki.html>

amazing animation

## Early Experimental Film

**Viking Eggeling**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/eggeling.html>

Diagonale Symphonie (1924, 7 min,)

**MAN RAY**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/ray.html>

works from the 1920s by the US photographer living in Paris

**Luis Bunuel,**

Un Chien andalou, 1929

<http://www.ubu.com/film/bunuel.html>

**Marcel Duchamp,**

Anemic Cinema, 1926 7 min

<http://www.ubu.com/film/duchamp.html>

**Fernand Leger and Dudley Murphy**

*Ballet méchanique* 1924

Controversy continues as to who was the more important maker here, but in any case, the film is astonishing.

**Lazlo Moholy-Nagy**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/moholy.html>

Lightplay (excerpt)

**Germaine Dulac,**

The Seashell and the Clergyman, 1926

<http://www.ubu.com/film/dulac.html>

A remarkable French surrealist work by Dulac based on Antonin Artaud's scenario. Artaud denounced the film as misrepresenting his intentions.

Feminists have come to the rescue, showing the qualities and integrity of Dulac's work. U.S. based critic Sandy Flitterman has lead the effort at rehabilitation.

**Hans Richter**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/richter.html>

Richter, like Maholy-Nagy, worked in both abstract forms and socially oriented work in Weimar Germany; when the Nazi's came to power, Richter had to flee; his films were destroyed by the Nazis as "decadent"

**Joris Ivens**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/ivens.html>

best known as a documentary filmmaker, these two lyrical pieces are from the 1920s:

*Rain*

### *The Bridge*

**Joseph Cornell,**  
Rose Hobart, 1936  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/cornell.html>

**Dziga Vertov**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/vertov.html>  
Kino-Eye  
Three Songs of Lenin

## Mid-period US Avant garde

**Maya Deren**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/deren.html>

**Sidney Peterson**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/peterson.html>  
*The Lead Shoes* (1949)

**Marie Menken**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/menken.html>  
*Glimpse of the Garden*

**Hy Hirsch,**  
Come Closer, 1952  
[http://www.ubu.com/film/hirsch\\_come\\_closer.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/hirsch_come_closer.html)  
(animation) Hirsch was the cameraman on *The Cage*

**Harry Smith,**  
Early Abstractions  
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-358588231080321772&q=harry+smith&total=1173&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=1>  
also--related videos in the series  
Smith showed these works with different (non-synch) soundtracks, including to "Meet the Beatles". The latter was withdrawn due to copyright, but you could always watch the film while playing the album.

## The Beats

**Alfred Leslie and Robert Frank**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/leslie.html>

*Pull My Daisy*

also at (with Italian subtitles): <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8994248541021504750&q=robert+frank&total=1148&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=2>

*The Last Clean Shirt* (by Leslie)

**Robert Frank**

Photos: Google image search

On Youtube: Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Friends in NY

On Youtube--various excerpts from his Rolling Stones film, "Cocksucker Blues"

**William S. Burroughs**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/burroughs.html>

the novelist did some work in film in collaboration with Anthony Balch and Brion Gysin

## New American Cinema (60s-70s)

**Shirley Clarke - Shorts (1953-1982)** A survey of short films by American independent filmmaker Shirley Clarke (1919-1997). Films include, "A Dance in the Sun" (1954), a portrait of dancer Daniel Nagrin; "A Moment in Love" (1957); "Bridges Go-Round" (1959) with two alternative soundtracks, one electronic music by Louis and Bebe Barron, the other jazz by Teo Macero; "A Scary Time" (1960) produced by UNICEF with a soundtrack by Peggy Glanville-Hicks; "Savage / Love" and "Tongues" (1981-82), a collaboration with Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaiken.

<http://www.ubu.com/film/clarke.html>

**Jonas Mekas**

<http://www.jonasmekas.com/>

the filmmaker's gallery-sponsored website

short free previews of 40 films; downloads available (\$)

365 project--daily short films by Mekas (\$ 4 for ipod; \$7 for DVD quality)

Guest filmmakers (includes Jacobs, Jarmush)

Check out he silver iPod with 40 of his films on it for only \$5000 (signed by JM)

**Carolee Schneeman**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/schneeman.html>

*Fuses*

(in 10 min parts) YouTube

**Taylor Mead**, The Movies are a Revolution (1963)  
[http://www.ubu.com/papers/mead\\_taylor-movies\\_revolution.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/mead_taylor-movies_revolution.html)  
The famous actor/poet comments on his roles

**Ron Rice**,  
Absurd Movies  
[http://www.ubu.com/papers/rice\\_ron-absurd\\_movies.pdf](http://www.ubu.com/papers/rice_ron-absurd_movies.pdf)  
Rice comments on his films

*The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* (1963); 110 minutes, black & white  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/rice.html>

**Ken Jacobs**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/jacobs.html>  
*Blonde Cobra*  
*Little Stabs of Happiness*

**FluxFilms** (1962 - 1970): UbuWeb is pleased to announce the return of FluxFilms. Dating from the sixties and compiled by George Maciunas (1931-1978, founder of Fluxus), this is a document consisting of 37 short films ranging from 10 seconds to 10 minutes in length. These films (some of which were meant to be screened as continuous loops) were shown as part of the events and happenings of the New York avant-garde. Made by the artists listed above, they celebrate the ephemeral humor of the Fluxus movement. Films by Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins, George Maciunas, Chieko Shiomi, John Cavanaugh, James Riddle, Yoko Ono, George Brecht, Robert Watts, Pieter Vanderbiek, Joe Jones, Eric Anderson, Jeff Perkins, Wolf Vostell, Albert Fine, George Landow, Paul Sharits, John Cale, Peter Kennedy, Mike Parr, Ben Vautier. (MPEG)

**Fluxus**  
37 short Fluxus Films  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/fluxfilm.html>

Fluxus was more inspired by European Dada intentions than the New American Cinema line of development and it encompassed objects and events as well as films.

**YOKO ONO**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/ono.html>  
*Fly*  
and several of her fluxus films

**George LANDOW** (aka Owen Land)  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/landow.html>

*Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1970)  
*Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles Etc.*  
(1965-66)  
Landow was associated with Fluxus

**Not Fluxus:**

**Hollis Frampton,**  
*Zorns Lemma*, 1970, 59 min.  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/frampton.html>  
a classic structural film

**Ernie Gehr**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/gehr.html>  
*Shift*  
*Serene Velocity* (awful short version--beware, this is NOT the experience of the film)

**James Broughton**  
Gardner of Eden  
This is It  
High Kukus  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/broughton.html>  
Better known for his earlier work, done around the same time as Sidney Peterson, and also in San Francisco, this is Broughton's return to filmmaking later in life.

**Peter Rose**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/rose.html>

## More recent U.S. avant garde

**Abigail Child,**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/child.html>  
*Mayhem*, 1987, 20 min  
*Perils*, 1986, 5 min  
*Mercy*, 1989, 10 min  
Child's intense work combines found footage with dramatic original work.

**Henry Hills**  
<http://www.ubu.com/film/hills.html>  
money

# **Post-WW2 European Avant garde**

**Dziga Vertov Group** (collective of Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, and others)

[http://www.ubu.com/film/dziga\\_vertov.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/dziga_vertov.html)

Vladimir and Rosa

Pravda

Wind from the East

Struggle in Italy

Following the May '68 political uprising in France, for a while Godard worked collectively in extremely militant films combining avant garde techniques and heavy duty political content. For a useful intro to Wind From the East, Julia Lesage's article:

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC04folder/WindfromEast.html>

## **Guy Debord**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/debord.html>

Society of the Spectacle 1973

Debord headed a group called The Situationists who advanced a radical critique of modern society and culture which influenced many thinkers and artists. They were preceded by the Lettrists, who are also represented on UbuWeb (see Isou in particular)

## **Harun Farocki**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/farocki.html>

*Inextinguishable Fire* 1969

Farocki has long made politically motivated films that critique how images are used by the dominant culture.

## **Robert Kramer**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/kramer.html>

*Ice*, 1969

Kramer represents one strain of the US New Left of the 60s. In this dramatic fiction, he anticipates a near-future where urban guerillas fight the system by forcing middle class people to watch "revolutionary" films at gunpoint. (I'm not kidding.)

## **Werner Schroeter**

Der Tod der Maria Malibran 1972

German director Schroeter is a founder of the New German Cinema

## **Jean Rouch**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/rouch.html>

Les Maitres fous 1955

French maker of over 100 documentary films, Rouch is recognized as a pioneer in creating new approaches to film

#### **Groupe Medvedkine**

*Nouvelle Societe no. 7* 1969

Following the May 68 events in France, a collective made this and other activist propaganda films. Left filmmaker Chris Marker was the leading light in the group.

#### **Chris Marker**

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1hicj\\_chris-marker-lettre-de-siberie\\_shortfilms](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1hicj_chris-marker-lettre-de-siberie_shortfilms)  
a famous short section of his film *Letter From Siberia* in which different voice overs and music give completely different interpretations of the same footage.

#### **Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville**

France/tour/détour/deux/enfants, color, sound

Godard and Miéville made several highly politicized and highly experimental works for French television. The avant garde "film essay" at its high point.

## **Queer Experimental Cinema**

Various works by Kenneth Anger can be found with a Google or Yahoo Video search. If you're really hardy, you can try a download at  
<http://greylodge.org/gpc/>

#### **Jean Genet,**

*Un Chant d'Amour* 1950, 25 min.

<http://www.ubu.com/film/genet.html>

the available prints in the US are deteriorated, so this is actually a better viewing choice.

#### **Jack Smith**

[http://www.ubu.com/film/smith\\_jack.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/smith_jack.html)

*Scotch tape*

*Normal Love*

*Flaming Creatures*

Smith and his estate have been in extreme contention by rival groups and interests since his death, which is doubtless just what he wanted.

#### **George Kuchar**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/kuchar.html>

*Hold me while I'm Naked  
I, an Actress  
The Mongreloid*

**Jerry Tartaglia**

<http://www.ubu.com/film/tartaglia.html>

*Ecce Homo*, 1989, 7 min

A gay film, based in part on Genet's film cut against contemporary commercial gay porn

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## Some Latin American Work

**Thomas Gutierrez Alea**

Short clips on YouTube

The truth of the group is in the killer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EnYbmYh7Xo>

a classic section of *Memories of Underdevelopment*, this essayistic montage argues that the police or army "killer" who attacks progressives using torture and murder outside the law, actually exists to provide "plausible deniability" to the "upright" members of the dictator's regime, including compliant clergy, lawyers, businessmen, intellectuals, etc. who validate the government.

**Santiago Alvarez**

*Now*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2E432cl5V3c>

Cuba's major documentary maker in one of his most famous experimental pieces, a reflection on race in the US.

*Hanoi, Martes 13*

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3539880433524812696&q=%22santiago+alvarez%22&total=39&start=0&num=1>

0&so=0&type=search&plindex=3

Visually poetic film celebrating the North Vietnam side of the Indochina war.

**Fernando Birri**

*Tire Dei*

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=9051606434859670675&q=fernando+birri&total=8&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=2>

One of the founding films of the New Latin American cinema, this social protest piece shows Argentine poor children who risk their lives to beg train passengers to toss them some coins.

## **Writings on the avant garde**

**Gene Youngblood's** classic book, *Expanded Cinema* (400+ pages!)  
<http://www.ubu.com/historical/youngblood/index.html>

Stan Brakhage TWO ESSAYS BY PAUL ARTHUR

[http://www.criterion.com/asp/in\\_focus\\_essay.asp?id=13&eid=310](http://www.criterion.com/asp/in_focus_essay.asp?id=13&eid=310)  
[http://www.criterion.com/asp/in\\_focus\\_essay.asp?id=13&eid=299](http://www.criterion.com/asp/in_focus_essay.asp?id=13&eid=299)

and of course, the previously mentioned site: fredcamper.com

## **Postmodernism**

being after modernism

What was modernism? In the visual arts: Picasso, Abstract Expressionism; music: Stravinsky, literature T.S. Eliot James Joyce

1. vs. eclecticism, for the clean, machine age, Bauhaus, form follows function
2. novelty and originality, always avant garde
3. reject decoration, ornament; for geometric, clear
4. vs. national, regional, vernacular, for the international and cosmopolitan
5. art of the future--would affect society (but fundamentally elitist--intellectuals will decide) example: Le Corbusier housing blocks

“High Modernism” stands apart from, above, popular and commercial mass culture.

### postmodernism

characteristics:

1. plurality of styles, hybrid, eclecticism
2. recycling of styles, "retro style"; quotations, collage, parody, pastiche
3. ornament and decoration
4. mix high and low culture, assumes various responses from general public and those "in the know"--[a kind of irony] but makes work accessible to both
5. concern with meaning, statement (art can communicate, this should be a concern of the artist)
6. "intertextuality" constant reference to the world of art, of media itself, as an artificial but real part of existence. Art and discourse structure the way we understand the world of "the Real". Out there is in here.

**Notes for a lecture on Postmodernism**

**SFSU Nov 89**

Course title: Media and Social Change

assigned text:

Jameson, Postmodernism, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

key question:

If the analysis of Postmodernism is correct, what does that say about media and social change? my conclusion will address this

key opening questions

Is the art/culture of the present different than the art/culture of the past (ie first half of 20th C)

Is contemporary consciousness different than consciousness in the past?

my answer to both is yes...what's important is how the current scene differs.

But this also implies the need for a new strategy in terms of art and media and social change.

Some remarks on my writings (read earlier in this course)

**Working Class Heroes.**

An attempt to explain in a sympathetic way why certain films appeal to a working class audience (and don't appeal to a middle class one).

1. getting beyond judgement and instant dismissal of "lower" popular culture
  - a. from the high culture position
  - b. from the working class/lower middle class position (I already understand it, why should I study it? it is transparent to me, whereas high culture isn't.)
2. attempt to explain audience response with a sociological specification of white working class male consciousness (by reading lit on white working class)
3. still valid in certain ways, could be extended to action films, applies to sports
  - a. example of Pete Rose, the remarkable athlete, the achilles heel of gambling and extreme pride, self-delusion.
  - b. film, MEN MEN MEN (much on sunday tv images)

### **Notes on Melodrama**

again, taking up a downgraded form usually dismissed (soap opera, weepies, etc.) and trying to take seriously its appeal

and connecting that to a sociological/marxist-feminist analysis of the the nature of the family under capitalism

similarly, Lesage on Christian TV: not that it is ideologically good, but why is it appealing to so many? what is the appeal of the religious and conservative Right? how do they try to persuade people, why have they been successful at

using the media, what are the limitations of what they are doing? What can feminists and leftists learn from this?

segue/

this is the progressive side of asking the question, but it can be asked from other perspectives:

Robert Venturi, Learning from Las Vegas. 1972. Taking a long serious look at LV architecture--the complete antithesis of high modernist elite architecture, and then taking it seriously: argument that for all its gaudiness, it is functional and enjoyable, it doesn't demand that you stand in awe of it, you can have a different relation to it...fun, entertainment (which is what LV is about anyway).

the tension in analysis, once you get beyond high culture moralism and dismissal of mass culture: between

it's fun, people can make what they want of it, lighten up, it's democratic and good

and

there may be something we want to question here, but we need to understand it before we pass judgement on it.

this is the current debate that is going on in the analysis of the mass culture audience

(will return to this point)

## Defining Postmodernism

1. the term is now so widely used that it has been taken up in commercials, ads, MTV, etc. as well as by theorists...it loses its theoretical "punch" in the process.

ask: *what is Postmodern MTV, what is shown in that slot?*

work that doesn't quite fit into other market categories: not heavy metal, mainstream rock, r&b/soul, rap, etc. Kind of post new wave, a little arty. The visuals are usually artier, a bit less on the performers per se (but they are not star/celebrities yet)

2. The way that Jameson initially defines it is essentially negative (sees it basically as embodying a loss, a loss of the critical function of high modernist art) But, Jameson's essay is somewhat confused and confusing about this matter (will discuss later). So, I'll start with my own definition.

## **postmodernism**

**If we need a general name for the art of our time, across the different arts, then p-m will do. However, then it is larger than a movement. But in any strict sense, we'd have to say it is simply a later phase of Romanticism (Romanticism being the general framework for art in the Bourgeois/Capitalist era)**

being after modernism

1. vs. eclecticism (19th C. vice--the cluttered Victorian look), for the clean, machine age, Bauhaus, form follows function
2. novelty and originality, always avant garde, an art that looks to the future
3. reject decoration, ornament; for geometric, clear

4. vs. national, regional, vernacular, for the international and cosmopolitan

5. art of the future and better society--would affect society (but fundamentally elitist--intellectuals will decide)

example: Le Courbusier housing blocks

### postmod

characteristics:

1. plurality of styles, hybrid, eclecticism

2. recycling of styles, "retro style"; quotations, collage, parody, pastiche

3. ornament and decoration

4. mix high and low culture, assumes various responses from general public and those "in the know" [a kind of irony] but makes work accessible to both  
this is, however, a willingness of high culture to absorb low culture; low culture does not take on high culture in the same way.

5. concern with meaning, statement (art can communicate, this should be a concern of the artist)

6. "intertextuality" constant reference to the world of art, of media itself, as an artificial but real part of existence. Art and discourse structure the way we understand the world of "the Real". Out there is in here.

a text to work from: Bruce Connor, **A Movie**

an example of Pop Art (like Warhol)

1. easy to look at, recognizable
2. comic, (ironic, parodic)
3. a celebration of commercial-industrial culture

4. gets beyond the rarified high culture area
5. shows the world of the already mediated, the world presented to us as media--gives it to us with a deadpan response (that then becomes a moral-ethical stance).

## SHOW

1. a broad and wide appeal
2. anti-sentimentalism (but has its own form--nostalgia)
3. works through displacement and recontexting
4. a certain coolness against the ruptured surface technique (severe montage)
5. not about the found object from the past, about "time" because it is definitely placed in the present, the now.

Pop--political or not? Warhol--Coca-cola, same beverage for President and common person, a kind of democracy of consumption

Pop can make a comment:

show clip from Anger, **Scorpio Rising**. A comment on masculinity, (gay masculine images, but also a joke on all men) and also a comment on mass culture images (and music)...this is "political" in being a comment on the culture and symbols of power in a culture. (thesis: in advanced capitalism, such a politics is a pre-requisite to a politics which effectively takes on production and the state).

the argument against such an analysis (by both the committed left and the burnedout former left a la Baudrillard) is that such dissent is simply a drop in the

ocean--it goes back into the ocean of media images and is lost as more washes over consciousness.

The problem for the political artist:

- what common basis do people share that you can use for making a statement?
- can you avoid sentimentalism which simply calls for a re-fabricated automatic emotion? how? icons of our time--the nuclear mushroom cloud, the space shuttle, a few bars of a song to evoke a decade (Charleston for 20s, etc.)
- what use or possibility is there for recycling images and still saying something if these images are already over-produced?

is there, finally, a watering down of appropriated image material?

how and why are images/sounds owned? what is the nature of copyright, "intellectual property" What do we do in an age of digital reproduction technology?

Jameson's essay

1. inconsistent--clearly prejudiced against postmodernism at start, yet at end claims we shouldn't be moralistic in understanding it
2. actually part of a book he writes throughout the 80s; typical of J, his early drafts are filled with flakey comments (Beatles and Stones as "high modernist")
3. argument is incomplete
4. but it is an important essay (in its different versions) because many people were influenced by it and commented upon it, in that sense it did what he wanted it to do--provide a political intervention for left cultural criticism in the current

understanding of art; it also is important for existing in (implied) response to certain arguments in continental social/political analysis (eg Lyotard, Baudrillard)

although I would argue that it is in the area of visual art criticism that the most interesting and sophisticated understanding develops of the same phenomenon, and in large part that is because there are artists who are producing interesting and challenging work within a post modern vein that is political (developed at end) Godard remains the pioneering example of this.

Jameson

show slides

### Van Gogh **Peasant Shoes** vs. Warhol **Diamond Dust Shoes**

briefly describe--VG several studies of details, (the "close up" before cinema exists) of realist metonymy (part for whole) actually it makes more sense to place this within a realist aesthetic than a "modernist" one, but Jameson is a sloppy art critic/historian; but won't grant this to Warhol (actually at least 3 versions of DDS) (surface textured with Diamond dust) but it doesn't fit a realist pattern, but it does fit a post modern pattern. (it's also playing with surface texture (as did abstract impressionists) and punning with a certain self-referentially (diamond dust as industrial byproduct, also as valuable commodity, but then here treated without reverence for its supposed commodity rareness, but just a textural appropriation--a comment on the art market as well) that Warhol understood perfectly as an artist working in the realm of celebrity--his work could only be known within the context of his work.

J's nostalgia for realism--he reads the VG image from its (supposed) context

intentional, biographical criticism (it expresses work, labor, peasant life) (although from a strict art historical view we know that these are shoes that he bought from a peddler and himself walked around in to get muddy) J doesn't see how much he is buying into the "myth" of VG in interpreting the image  
but he can't accept the high heel shoes of Warhol as icons of anything  
but to apply the same biographical/intentional criticism to Warhol we'd have to see it as a motif of his career, and also place it as a contemporary icon for female glamour (MTV, etc.) in other words, advertising and mass culture images are part of our context in the contemporary world  
so, Jameson's ability to read a political meaning in Peasant Shoes is essentially an allegorical reading, a reading done by taking information from outside the work and applying it to the work; but he denies any allegorical reading to Warhol (though we could obviously make one up--even a political allegory)

Thus, J's argument that there is a "waning of affect" (decrease in expressive emotion, in other words a "coolness"--as in cool Jazz of 50s) in postmodern work is in part dependent on a highly prejudicial self selection of work to discuss. And his other terms at this point are also highly charged with value judgement: Pastiche over Parody, Historicism or the "neo" over History (a sense of historical development); the Nostalgia mode, the loss of the past, the breakdown in the signifying chain producing "schizophrenic" art, the "Hysterical sublime" etc. At this point, I'd argue, Jameson is just tossing concepts around without really being rigorous--this is one of his biggest flaws as a critic--the tendency to bullshit when he really hasn't done his homework; a certain male privilege in getting away with it.

and also a mark that he really doesn't have peers in either marxist literary criticism (who could call him on it) or for that matter in conservative or liberal circles (where his intellectual peers lack J's wide ranging comparative literature sweep of imagination). This is the problem then with Andrew Britton's response to Jameson (which is later in this course).

Jameson argues that we are now in a different phase of capitalism: multinational capitalism, or post-industrial (service sector in the capitalist core; industrial/agricultural labor in the developing world) marked by a strong consumer culture in the capitalist core. We can quibble about details, but basically I think he's right--certain aspects of international capitalism are stronger than nation-states, and this seems to imply a different kind of political struggle than just taking state power following a Leninist model (this is a big discussion I can't get into here) in the capitalist core.

Britton is so nit-picking that he loses any sense of what the big question is and just becomes a snide and self-defeating critic (eg "mr." as a sneer to his opponents): Britton doesn't want to see that it is precisely the problems with traditional Marxist criticism that leave it with nothing to say on any level of cultural intervention in the contemporary art world or critical/intellectual world. Jameson at least is addressing the issue, Britton (while I would agree with him on numerous specific points) has nothing to offer someone who wants to make art and change the world in our present world.

Thus at the end Jameson does come around to trying to deal with the present, and this is in his discussion of the Bonaventure Hotel in LA. (ask who's seen it; equivalent buildings in other cities, in SF?) He sees this building as presenting a

new and difficult way of seeing, sensing, experiencing space, a way that abolishes critical distance,.. and then he argues that we may need a new kind of cognitive mapping to understand this new already existing but not yet understood space, the space of the new city.

What he doesn't allow for, however, is that it may simply be that Fred Jameson, verbal intellectual, literary critic, has this problem and that other people don't--in other words it may be that people with a strong visual imagination don't share this dilemma of the print medium intellectual. My mother, for example, has no particular problem negotiating such "postmodernist" buildings and spaces once she takes a little time to look them over--eg new United terminal at O'Hare, State of Illinois building, Hyatt Regency, etc etc. Nor did she have much of a problem understanding MTV: the first time she saw music videos she thought they were confusing, but then on her own she figured out, after watching three or four of them, that they were "telling little stories" and "using trick photography" as she put it, and then watched them without any cognitive problems.

It seems to me that part of the problem with Jameson is that he lives on the other side of the tv generation, and this is something that decisively marks intellectuals in trying to deal with mass culture today. I grew up with tv, I experienced adolescence via rock and roll on a transistor radio, I love to "graze" television by using the remote control to flip channels through cable tv. My experience of the world is different from that of previous generations as a result.

there has been a change in consciousness: example of change from print culture (he said, I said) to visual culture (he goes, I'm like) (elaborate with dramatic examples)

So, speaking as an artist, as a film and video maker, I can only be a postmodernist--that is the idiom of my time, of my imagination is one in which Postmodernism is the "cultural dominant" as Jameson argues. But I don't think that then keeps me from making political art. It just means I'll make it in a way that works with the (mediated) reality I have to work with.

So, to turn the criticism around. we need to look at Jameson from the point of view of what he most decisivley leaves out:

he doesn't discuss women or female artists much less feminism or feminist artists--though they are certainly significant (as post mod eg Laurie Anderson; as political, Barbara Kruger)

he doesn't discuss race or ethnic issues in contemporary culture

he doesn't deal with gay/lesbian/bi or other gender issues

he doesn't deal with the Third World or imperalsim

he doesn't deal with anti-nuclear issues or the ecology/green movement

he doesn't deal with youth culture (except in a few tangential remarks)

not the topics of the traditional left: the labor movement, electoral politics

(nor does Andrew Britton in his critique of Jameson)

so, there's a certain way in which Jameson also seems to be erecting the notion of postmodernism as an area of political critical concern as a way of avoiding precisely those social and political movements which are most active and engaged at the very time he is writing...here we are in the middle of Reagan's first term as president and Jameson is writing his major book of the 80s while studiously ignoring the political movements around him. What is going on? What is he afraid of?

To return then to some of the initial questions I raised.

First, postmodernism, in the broad sense is the art of our time, it is international (at least in urban third world)

the period of digital reproduction, of the copy of a copy...of audio sampling and xeroxing, and scanned images being processed and recollaged and produced

the dominance of the image in culture--the end of the print media as dominant, visual media as now dominant--nonverbal communication becomes more important.

it is a result of the collapse of high art and mass commercial art into the same cultural sphere

breakdown of genre distinctions, mixing of modes (fiction/nonfiction; docudrama, trash news ("gut news") America's Most Wanted, A Current Affair, Entertainment Tonight

it rests on eclecticism, fragmentation and reappropriation of mediated material

it can be simply superficial and slick (as can realism or modernism) it can be assimilated to the dominant values (Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass)

and it can be used in a critical and politically motivated way pointing to social change. But then we have to look at what areas are actually in motion, where change is a strong potential or actually happening. (ACT UP, abortion rights, anti-censorship of arts, etc.)

the special powers of political postmodernism

1. where people need information and analysis, especially as an alternative to the dominant media, and a desanctifying of the typical "authority" of the dominant
2. ability to shift emotional registers dramatically: going far beyond "cool"; ability to take on vastly different materials in vastly different contexts and still make cultural sense, to produce meaningful commentary, critique of culture and an enjoyable experience at the same time (especially with the acceptance of humor as part of the basic working of the mode)

some examples:

Fernando Birri, **My Son Che**

Marlon Riggs, **Tongues Untied**

show: **MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT** clips

- a) censorship clips at ICAIC

b) "the truth is in the group"--a political appropriation of the image material, a returning it to History (this film is also about urban space and cognitive mapping)

show: **SCENES FROM THE MICROWAR** (Ernie Larsen, Sherry Millner)clip  
dinertable countdown--the logic of living pop culture fantasies, critique of the the  
rightwing notion of the family

show: **UNBIDDEN VOICES** clip (Parasher, Ellis)

SPICES segment and discussion of women/representation; appropriation from  
mass culture.

# Reading Theory: rules of thumb

## 07:14:00

14/12/2004

- ← Put your primary effort into reading the original, rather than commentaries
  - ! Work from the “best” overview, initially
    - If possible, use translator’s and editor’s notes
  - ! Supplement it at a later point with
    - other commentaries,
    - examine the controversies
- ← Outline and summarize the main ideas
  - ! Stick to the “big ideas”
  - ! Don’t nit-pick; be generous
  - ! Start with the introduction and conclusion (quick overview)
  - ! Quickly review the notes and bibliography, appendixes
  - ! Analyze the methodology
    - What is it?
    - Does it seem adequate?
- ← Draw on your previous knowledge
  - ! Make up your own mind; be open to change
- ← Ask others
  - ! People who are informed
  - ! Not informed, but interested
    - Try explaining the ideas (social, conversation)
- ← Be aware of the entire range of someone’s work
  - ! If reading in translation, be aware of the entire body of work in the original language
  - ! But concentrate, at first, on the key texts
  - ! Understand the trajectory of the person’s career
    - Obituaries, summaries, etc.

- ! Use: bookstores (tangible and virtual)
- ! online sources (retail and academic)
- ! library resources
  - early on, try to work in a major library or a consortium library
- ← Understand the historical and local context
  - ! For this, commentaries may be important
- ← Understand the disposition of thinkers at the time
  - ! Predecessors, teachers
  - ! Colleagues, collaborators, students
  - ! Rivals
  - ! critics
  - ! Opponents
  - ! Look for what may be hidden, forgotten, taken-for-granted (timeline, chronology)
- ← Understand the thinker's reception (timeline, chronology)
  - ! Critical
  - ! Academic
  - ! Translation
  - ! Commentary, interpretation, use
    - Case studies in extension
  - ! France: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze (and Guatarri), Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Baudrillard, Barthes, Kristeva & Tel Quel, etc.
- ←
- ← Compare others dealing with the same issues from
  - ! Other disciplines
  - ! Other nations, intellectual traditions
  - ! Anglo-US:
    - 1. Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and British Cultural Studies
    - 2. Other UK sociology of culture:
      - Theory, Culture & Society
      - Media, Culture, and Society
    - 3. US: Herbert Gans, Howard Becker
- ←

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Preliminary notes on the work of art in the age of reproductive systems  
draft version, 5 May 86, circulated for discussion and criticism.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin analyses the change that takes place when the unique art object is supplanted by or has to exist along side of the work such as the photograph which exists in multiple copies, none of which is truly "the original." Benjamin's analysis changed the way we think about art, particularly media arts. At the same time, though, there is a further development in art expression which has become fully apparent only in more recent times. This new development is based around several significant additions to the cultural world around us: electronic transmission, reproductive systems technology, and the exponential growth of media material. While none of these alone completes the change, together they form a new situation.

Electronic transmission, as with the radio, existed in Benjamin's time, but not to the extent that it dominates in ours. Because it creates the possibility for instantaneous communication, it has "shrunk the globe," as is often said. Of course, from a Marxist point of view, it is not substantially different than the telegraph. That is under capitalism the technology remains in the hands of capitalists or the state as a moderator of conflicting capitalist interests. And under existing forms of socialism it remains centralized in state organization. In these ways the mere fact of satellite relays does not automatically change anything: social relations remain intact. That is, there are still classes within society, there is still restricted ownership and control of transmission, and technological change alone does not change that. In fact there's a very good case to be made that it simply increases control and centralizes it. Yes you can buy a modem at Radio Shack, but you still have to use the transmission facilities of a corporation to transmit to someone else. In that sense you still are within the same social framework as having to use the U.S. post office or UPS to send your illegally duped videotape or xeroxed copy of something.

So, we always have to ask, about any technological change or development, how it effects social relationships in society and how it fits into the economic organization of the culture. Many changes take place in the superstructure without producing a change in the infrastructure. Failing to understand this, our analysis of technological change can easily run aground. In the early 60s, for example, Marshall McLuhan posited a change in consciousness and society based on his observation of a very different media environment around us. By combining an historical analogy and phenomenological positivism, he concluded that consciousness itself was changing on an individual and global level because of technological change. (note--historical analogy: his book previous to *The Medium Is The Message* was *The Gutenberg Galaxy* which argued that mass printing changed culture and was the motor of all change since the medieval period. Marxists would argue the decisive factor in this observable change was the shift from a feudal to a capitalist economy and a corresponding change in social relationships. McLuhan implicitly argued the same kind and degree of change was taking place with the modern means of communication. In this sense there was an historical basis for his argument, though it was phrased in such a way that few of his followers understood this. Phenomenological positivism: positivism asserts that the world can only be understood through direct examination of existing phenomena, and is the basis of the dominant scientific methodology since Newton; in its extreme form applied to the social world, it denies historical and structural analysis. Phenomenology is that form of positivism in which it transmutes back into idealist thought by asserting that the perceptual-cognitive act/moment itself is the only way of knowing reality. Thus for McLuhan, the experiential character of the medium of communication completely overrides the content.)

A more contemporary example is provided by Gene Youngblood, who in his ongoing examination of new communications and information technology is very good at finding and synthesising the logical thread of development of technology, but who, in retrospect, reveals himself as totally unable to deal with existing or future social relations: thus his "predictions" from 15 years ago are absurd when read today because he assumes that technology alone produces changed consciousness and changed social relations and he has a boundless enthusiasm for new developments which he never puts in the context of a social system which stratifies power. Youngblood is a good example of technological determinism linked to the post-WW2 development of "communications" as an overtly neutral and scientific but in fact highly ideological and capitalist-determined body of knowledge and corresponding set of investigative methodologies: comm studies is simply the most overt form of this.

But to get back to electronic transmission. Essentially what electronic communication establishes once and for all is a necessarily complex set of networks among different people which is so dense that it cannot be fully and effectively monitored. Consider: the mail as a means of communication can be closely monitored in several ways which are relatively simple: any suspect organization or person using third class bulk mail can have their address list easily reproduced by the police; similarly, outgoing phone calls can be easily logged. But it is extremely costly and inefficient to actually try to listen to, much less record and transcribe, all the phone calls made by suspect people and only the most "dangerous" or vulnerable get this treatment. (For a fuller explanation of this and its implications, see Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a

Theory of the Media," in his *The Consciousness Industry*.) Furthermore , electronic communications systems remain significantly freer in some ways from interference at the point of reception. Obviously this is the case in radio and other broadcast reception--precisely why clandestine radio has been so often important in national liberation and anti-imperialist struggles in the Third World. (example of Radio Venceremos system in El Salvador; parallel case of underground radio in Italy) The mail system depends on a specific person physically delivering a specific item to a specific address and reception in this medium can be easily aand totally monitored. However the current use of beepers by drug dealers, gamblers, and others has foiled police surveillance: the receiver is beeped and gets a number to call back, goes to any phone and calls another public phone and the deal is made without the police being able to keep up with the transactions. Add here examples from satellite dishes, etc. Add here the potential for disrupting the system due to certain aspects of its centralization (eg Captain Midnight hacking of HBO). Add here the social alienation of the technicians needed to run the system (see "The Chips of Our Lives" and other readings in Processed World).

There is a tendency in this type of analysis to grant to much power to any one aspect of or development within the overall system. What is needed is a truly systemic analysis that accounts for all the different levels of communication and diffusion. And in terms of a radical analysis of how to organize within and around and in spite of the existing system, we need to be aware of all the different types of communication networking possible so that each can be used and maximized in its best inherent and operational way so that if one system is closed off others can be easily shifted to and exploited.

### Reproductive System Technology

Benjamin's analysis tends to be built around the model of the lithograph and photograph where there is no original but only copies. However in both media there are still "masters"--the litho stone itself and the photographic negative. Even those who took to mass circulation printing, such as Heartfield, created a master plate and used the full talent of their craft to execute it. I think it is arguable that things have changed with the advent of reproductive systems such as xerox, vcrs, audio cassette, image digitizers such as Thunderscan for the MacIntosh computer, etc. Here the idea of a flawless copy is displaced by the fact of a "good enough" approximation. Thus the hit song is taped on a radio-cassette recorder and further tapes are then duped on the same or another dubbing recorder. Of course there is generation deterioration, but it doesn't bother the people who are doing it. Similarly, most people with VCRs copy broadcast programs or dupe movies on cassette on the slowest possible speed and accept the trade off of lower quality for inexpensive reproduction. Nearly total unreadability seems to be the only significant threshold.

A second and related aspect of current reproductive systems is that they operate on the desirability of copies of copies. That is people working with these systems, particularly on a consumer level, have no qualms about copying (or with satellite dishes, receiving) and in fact take it for granted that they have the "right" to do so. To the point that when originators attempt to control their image, sound and other material, they are confronted with disruption (Captain MIdnight) and wide scale flaunting of the law. (Surely more people have copied and continue to copy copyright materials than smoke marijuana...this is probably the most widely scofflawed behavior in the U.S. today.) The consumer domain is assumed to be the public domain. It is also clear that capitalism has a vague and widely contradictory understanding of this, so you have conglomerates which are hedging their own bets by putting money into sectors and activities which depend on ownership and control and at the same time are developing and selling hardware which undermines ownership and control. The capitalist state is fundamentally unable at present to negotiate the conflicting claims of different capitalists around these issues, and thus the actual working out of copyright ownership is an impossible tangle. Is a colorized version of a black and white film a new object which can be recopied? Is a synthetic image taken from several pre-existing images a new and copyrightable image? Can the owners of the original images demand control or payment for the previous image material? What is the status of an image or a sound in the age of -age: collage, assemblage, montage. What is the nature of such material when it circulates freed of its original ownership? When it is significalntly altered by the reproductive system (eg xeroxing a continuous tone image, digitizing a copyright image)?

# **RTF 422 Media Aesthetics: Sexual Representation**

Fall 2002

TuTh 3-5, 102 AMS (and other spaces)

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## **Sexual Representation**

A broad overview of media representations of sexuality ranging from advertising to Hollywood film, high art to commercial pornography. Topics covered include the "sex wars" debates within feminism in the 1980s, policy and legal issues of censorship and regulation, new technologies such as digital/internet pornography, the use of sexual images within sexual subcultures, avant garde and grassroots examples. In addition to theoretical, cultural, and textual analysis, social, legal, and policy analysis will be included in a multi-faceted approach to the key issues. Emphasis will be on the evolution of critical discussion of sexual images in the past decade and new voices engaging the issues.

### Course goals

- To provide a broad introduction to and overview of the field of sexual representations.
- To study provide a background to critical thinking about the key issues
- To examine recent developments in the analysis of pornography
- To investigate new issues brought about by technological change such as the change from film to video and the presence of the internet.
- To consider the social context of image cultures.
- To learn the new scholarship in the field, and the problems of developing critical thinking about controversial materials.

Enrollment: 12, permission of instructor required. The course examines fundamental issues in the representation of sexuality and gender which are ongoing policy and practical concerns for media professionals. Examples will be taken from advertising, telecommunication, commercial film and television, popular music, commercial pornography, the taboo-breaking avant-garde, sex education, and materials circulated for and within stigmatized sexual subcultures.

The course will include lecture, presentations, screenings, readings and discussion. Material will be screened in class as well as involve student initiated research. Much of the material will be controversial; some of it will be intentionally offensive. Because discussion will be a central mode of class meetings, regular

attendance and preparation of the assigned readings will be essential, as well as tolerance for a wide range of views over an unusually controversial set of issues.

Students can opt for one of several approaches to the course which will be worked out with the professor. Everyone will do some core readings and some individual additional reading which will be reported to the class. Beyond that, students can choose:

- a. a broad exploratory reading of the state of the field, documented with a journal or set of short papers
- b. an intermediate research aimed at depth examination of one area, emphasizing reading and a final outline for an article or elegant review of the question with an elaboration of future research/argument/analysis
- c. a seminar type research or critical paper aimed at being the first draft of a conference presentation or scholarly article.

Assigned readings

Books are available a Norris Center store

Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (California) Expanded paperback edition

Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged*, paperback (Duke)

Pamela Church Gibson, *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*. British Film institute, paperback

Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* NYU, paperback

Students should expect to purchase/rent/obtain through interlibrary loan/or otherwise access some additional books, video/DVDs, etc. Additional screenings may need to be arranged of film materials in a different room. Some films screened in Chuck's Experimental Film course (TuTh 10-12) are relevant to the course

## **PART ONE: HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND SEXUAL REPRESENTATION?**

### **Th Sept 26**

course overview

screening: *The O'Reilly Factor* (clip) and other short work  
lecture:

- A. the sex wars debate, a brief history and analysis
- B. the social constructionist argument about sexuality

### **Tu Oct 1**

internet research project, one (detailed in handout)  
reading:

John Berger, **Ways of Seeing**, (all quickly, with attention to last two chapters on images of women)

Kleinhans, "Teaching Sexual Images: Some Pragmatics"

Rabinowitz, "Barbara Stanwyck's Anklet"

Slide lecture on semiotics of the image: high heel shoes 1

### **Th Oct 3**

reading/report:

by Wed. at 5 pm, post first outside reading discussion on Blackboard

Slide lecture on semiotics of the image: shoes 2

## **PART TWO: WHAT IS PORN, WHAT IS ITS HISTORY? ITS INSTITUTIONAL NATURE?**

### **Tu Oct 8**

read: Williams, to p. 152

screening and discussion: clips TBA

**Th Oct 10**--screening (Chuck out of town)  
second outside reading discussion on Blackboard  
in-class screening, PBS Frontline, "American Porn" and additional selection, TBA  
such as Dreamworks 2, Not A Love Story, etc.

### **Tu Oct 15**

net: Frontline American Porn website

read: finish Williams

screening and discussion, clips TBA

### **Th Oct 16**

--internet porn, (meet in Fisk computer lab)

read: "Sex Sells" (Wired article on porn entrepreneur Warshawsky)

## **PART THREE; CASE STUDY, PERFORMER AND CAREER: ANNIE SPRINKLE**

### **Tu Oct 22**

outside screening: *Boogie Nights* (d. Paul Thomas Anderson)

read:

Straayer, Williams in *Dirty Looks*, Kleinhans "When Did Annie Sprinkle become a Performance Artist?" (handout)  
screening and discussion: *Annie Sprinkle's Herstory of Porn*

**Th Oct 24**

read:

articles by Kapsalis, Colby, Sprinkle; net sites on Sprinkle  
screening and discussion: *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle*

**Tu Oct 29**

screen: Annie Sprinkle, early loops  
clips from "roughies"

reading and preliminary discussion

Dyer, "Gay Male Porn"

Waugh, "Men's Pornography: Gay vs. Straight"

**PART FOUR; PORNOGRAPHY AS SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

**Th Oct 31**

virtual communities

internet 2 meet in Fisk lab

reading: Kipnis 1 "Fantasy in America" intro to p. 62

**Tu Nov 5**

porn/erotica and cultural distinction

read:

Kipnis, 2 to the end.

Penley, "Crackers and Whackers"

screening (clips) and discussion

**Th Nov 7**

sexual subcultures and pornographic spaces

read:

Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*

Champagne, John. "Stop Reading Films!": Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography." *Cinema Journal* 36.4 (1997): 76-97.

**Tu Nov 12**

the avant garde community

read:

various short avant garde films on sexuality

## **PART FIVE: CHILD PORNOGRAPHY, VIRTUAL AND REAL, THE LAW AND THE IMAGE**

### **Th Nov 14**

read

Supreme Court decision in Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition  
Kincaid, "Myths, Legends, Folktales, and Lies" from *Erotic Innocence*  
Levine, "Manhunt: The Pedophile Panic" from *Harmful to Minors*  
internet searches on "child pornography"

### **Tu Nov 19**

read

Excerpts from Jenkins, *Beyond Tolerance*  
Higonnet, "Photographs Against the Law" from *Pictures of Innocence*  
Frauedenfelder, "Webcam Girls"

## **PART SIX: RESEARCH PROBLEMS, THEORY AND ETHICS, THEORY AND PRACTICE**

### **Th Nov 21**

articles by Waugh, Gaines, Straayer, Jenkins, Lehman

### **Tu Nov 26**

case study

read:

Kleinhans articles and work in progress on sexual representation

### **Th Nov 28 Thanksgiving holiday, no class**

### **Tu Dec 3**

presentation of student work

### **Th Dec 5**

presentation of student work

wrap up

**Final papers due.....5 pm Wed. Dec 11**

## Structuralism

1) a movement, method, first developed in anthropology and then transferred to the other human sciences which draws on structural linguistics (the work of Saussure).

Best known proponent, Claude Levi-Strauss. Essentially developed to study "static" cultures (therefore questionable how it can be applied to changing ones).

2) it relies on an analysis of relationships which are seen as significant patterns. (often patterns of binary opposition and substitution.) These are found through looking for patterns of repetition and difference. [explain, 19th c. discovery of classification by difference, not similarity]

example: oedipal conflict narrative. (a narrative structure)

basic structure: father and son in conflict over woman (3 term relationship)

woman has volition, can help one or other

father has initial power [NB these terms are symbolic]

must be displaced. a power struggle, but framed within gender and sexuality.

Basic Western Love Myth: Tristan and Isolde (tragic version)

Comic oedipal version. [see my analysis of Shampoo]

The basic question: once we see the repetition of the basic pattern over time and so many different examples in different times and places, we have to acknowledge that it is significant. Why is it there?

Structuralism was useful in cultural analysis because it went beyond, provided a position for critiquing:

Empiricism and positivism

empiricism: the world can be adequately known through examination of its tangible phenomenae

positivism: the tools and methods of investigating the hard sciences are applicable to social phenomenae;

anti-historical

Historicism; that history tells its own truth which is revealed in the evidence (as against contemporary notion that history is a constructed discourse about the past)

Rhetorical, Aristotelean analysis (another ahistorical analysis; mechanistic, of fixed categories (eg, tragedy)

Organic analysis: unity of form and content, very powerful when combined with historical analysis; but, has limits in cultural analysis when it does not offer a way of looking at systematic absence (esp. oppression), can be used to simply accept what already is, rather than look for potential for change. [NB structuralism has this same problem]

Structural analysis is also very compatible with Formalism, esp. as developed by Russian Formalists. Esp. in close analysis of formal features.

The appeal of structuralism. It tries to develop models which could then be used to analyze a relationship--it lends itself well to comparative analysis. In terms of film, it applies well to the patterns of repetition that were being developed in authorship criticism.

It also fits well with ideas of narrative, esp. well in terms of formulaic fictions, eg. mainstream Hollywood film.

It has been frequently used as an approach which combines genre and social analysis (eg Will Wright's Sixguns and Society; which see the critique of by Janey Place in JC); the problem with it is that it often remains static, and that it often refuses history.

Opens up the possibility of a symptomatic reading: something which is found to be significant in cultural objects being investigated, can itself be taken as evidence of a more profound pattern within the culture as a whole. (eg absence or marginalization of certain groups is itself revealing--Blacks appear only as servants, and only for a brief moment; women insignificant in (most examples of) war, gangster, western, male action film--there only to mark something about the hero, or to be raped or murdered to further the plot. Eg. 2nd Rambo film. NB. not in all cases, we are talking about dominant patterns, not absolute rules.

The dissatisfaction that most people feel with a pure structuralism (and why it hardly exists as such, at least in film studies) is that it seems finally, to assign agency (why things happen, how they might change) to the structure. (In this it is much like Jungian criticism, archetypal analysis.) In this sense its ideas tend to be taken over for diagnostic or symptomatic purposes rather than ends in themselves.

Some examples, developing structuralism in a Marxist/feminist criticism:

Charles Eckert, "Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's Marked Woman" in M&M2

Charles Eckert, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller" in JC: HP&CC.

Chuck Kleinhans, "Shampoo: Oedipal Symmetries and Heterosexual Knots" JC

Julia Lesage, "Celine and Julie Go Boating:" JC 24/25

The Cahiers analysis of Morocco

from CdC 225 (Nov-Dec 1970) 5-13

begins with quote from Georges Bataille which takes a dim view of H'wood:

"it seems impossible...to discover anywhere else in the world women so unnatural, gross, impossible." Love, the philosophy of the boudoir, is demeaned.

1. This analysis is a continuation of the YML piece

there CdC demonstrated that the ideological ↞ nonc↗ --what is uttered in itself--is subverted by the stress effects of the Fordian writing.

[i.e. Ford's style/form changes the ideological content]

2. YML is the ethical-political face of the capitalist and theological face of H'wood.

Morocco is its erotic face. H'wood is the major site of the production of the erotic myths of bourgeois society. (erotic is equated with fetishist, w/o explanation)

3. From Kristeva, the change in the 14th c. from epic to novelesque (romance).

woman is offered up as a "pseudo-center"; not as woman in her social reality but as figure which the man (author/hero) then relates to; she exists so he can act.

[NB this is an analysis of the text itself, not of the reception of the text; but that will be significantly changed in Mulvey's analysis which also draws on Berger's Ways of Seeing (implicitly, at least) because she will also discuss reception by the viewer-subject] this is also not really a very good analysis of changing nature of narrative placement of women at this time; cannot be sustained as an analysis in other national literatures very well. This section is the foundation for all later Lacanian influenced ideas on the position of women represented in the narrative.

4. NB. "This reciprocal absorption of the One and the Other (the Author and the Woman) within an effacement of sexual difference accounts for (and implies) the fact that the Masquerade, Virile Display and Inversion are the erotic paradigms of Morocco." Now, actually, all of this is also based very much on the knowledge of CdC that Sternberg was himself sexually ambiguous (bisexual, or multisexual). In many ways they cannot really accept this and their subsequent discussion (and that of many of the followers of this line of thought) are fundamentally premised on rigid sex/gender differentiation. They do not like ambiguity.

5. From Lacan: "in order to be the phallus (the signifier of the desire of the Other) {that is in order to function within the image/narration as the indicator of the woman's desire}, a woman will reject part of femininity, her attributes in the masquerade." [Is this really perfectly clear? No, not really, they borrow some concepts from Lacan, but it's a kind of imaginative borrowing--its useful to their purposes, they take it over very casually] See Fn to Montrelay: in order to produce this, a woman takes on masquerade (esp as clothing) to say nothing.

6. In YML the diegetic process called for a chronological reading. In Morocco the structures are repeated with variation. Thus a synchronic reading is justified.

7. There is a double determination--the erotic and the social.

8. Two love triangles:

La B. loves Amy Jolly who loves Brown

just as  
Caesar loves Mme. C. who loves Brown

(relationship of Europeans and Moroccans).

9. Erotic relations take place within the framework of a social situation which determines the erotic relations and is determined by them. The social and the erotic form two levels, "inscriptions" in the discourse. The existing social hierarchy is "perverted" by the erotic.

#### 10. Social stratification

- a. the haute bourgeoisie. La B.
- b. the colonial bourgeoisie. La B's friends, the dinner party
- c. the native bourgeoisie
- d. officers of the Legion (Capt. Caesar)
- e. owner of the cabaret
- f. lower strata of Legionnaires, Moroccan crowds, singers, dancers, prostitutes of the cabaret, camp followers.

The men are fixed in position, the women (may have) some fluidity. Mme Caesar dresses "down" as a Moroccan woman. Amy Jolly is fallen in class at the start, is promoted in the film and then chooses to fall again [but for a higher goal, true love, true desire].

The object of desire is of inferior status to the desiring subject. [NB w/in the diegesis]

11. The film shows a "topographical inscription": High/Low in the town and the cabaret; and horizontal between the town and the desert. Desiring subjects find their object in the depths. The desert is the pure signifier of desire.

sets of opposition

Europeans	Moroccans
Old World	New World (Brown)
status	d'class'
grids	uniform white expanse

12. Mythological determinations. The historical role of the star in the H'wood system. A star has a relatively restricted number of possible types. The extrafilmic and filmic come together in indicating a role. Importance of her first appearance; she has had wealth and erotic success, but this "past capital" has been squandered.

13. Von Sternberg's inscription. First LaB approx. = Sternberg. At first the protector and suitor of Deitrich, then the man who will not be taken over by a woman and who then devalues her. Second, theme of abandonment. Caesar is abandoned by his wife. La B is abandoned by Amy Jolly. La B lowers himself in the whole process [wouldn't this be better understood as masochism?] Note the transgressive effect--a transgression of the social codes through public admission of distress, defeat, irremedial loss.

14. [The analysis ignores the kiss AJ gives the woman in the cabaret. Is this a show for Brown? Yes, but it can also be taken in other ways; it too is a transgression of the social codes, through public admission of erotic interest in other women.]

15. The relation of femininity to virility is inverted from the phallocentric fantasy. Here Brown is inferior in social position and is AJ's object of desire. The women move from the Old World to the New, to the American. La B is an inverted virility--shows precious behavior. Similarly, Lo Tinto, the cafe owner, is mixed race, shows signs of femininity, gayness.

16. The critique of the fetishism of value. In H'wood fetishism moves from commodity to characters, in an erotic fiction.

17. "All values in Morocco are fetishes: money, jewels, clothes, woman (star)." These are extra-cinematic. Sternberg's use of their fetishist nature does not exhaust their value, but accentuates it. "The Sternbergian fetish, therefore, does not inscribe itself into the fiction solely as a signifier of castration--it is not solely involved in the trajectories of the erotic (as their cause)." [The is an acknowledgement here that the fetish object does not exist only as erotic, but also as social, in meaning; both are needed; in fact, one potentiates the other.]

18. [But much of the specific argument made here by CdC is based on Lacan's essay "The Signification of the Phallus," which is not a neutral analysis, e.g. the acceptance of the concept of castration as unproblematic. Why Lacan, and what did he say? Lacan introduces a version of Freudian psychoanalysis into French thought which had mostly rejected or resisted

psychoanalysis. He makes a number of very significant changes in Freud, particularly in locating the basis of consciousness not in a series of stages of development in childhood, but in the "mirror phase" and the acquisition of language. He takes over concepts of structural linguistics; his work, then, is in many ways complementary with that of Althusser on ideology.]

19. [The key question as it develops in terms of the transfer and development of ideas is how psychoanalysis is used, and its own status. In general, there is a problematic situation here. Freudian thought comes very early to the US, and very late to England and France. There is a rather massive extension, elaboration, and critique of Freudian thought, particularly in its implications for social action in the U.S. The early feminist movement in the US takes a very negative and skeptical view of Freudian analysis and its intellectual model; but the French, and in turn the British, find it very appealing and tend to be uncritical of the whole project. There ensues a very complicated, and often antagonistic use of psychoanalysis in critical discussion, particularly in feminist film thought. The important thing in terms of theoretical development, is the status of these concepts: there is often an extreme sliding between different levels of thought. The "scientificness" of psychoanalysis is invoked to declare its truth, but there is also a frequent use of it in a merely symbolic and approximate way, and a "hiding" of the more problematic aspects of it; this is particularly so with its relation to feminism. Rather than actually rigorously thinking through the conjunction of psychoanalysis, marxism, feminism, and film, and how they can be used together, often there is a sloppy ad hoc appropriation and/or a mere citation of authority. This is rather characteristic of film theory in general; often a wholesale taking over of a different system without really examining it carefully.]

20. Deitrich's power of seduction and fascination. In the cabaret, she is elusive and untouchable (except by Brown). She is fetishized in proportion to her inaccessibility. "The moralizing inscription of the renunciation of her accessories is overdetermined by the inscription of them as fetish objects which renew the chain of desire." The film ends up within H'wood--a circular critique of the ideology of natural purity and of fetishism by natural purity. The film ends with the fetish (AJ) chasing the mirage (Brown). [In other words, the film has a critique in it, a certain kind of critique, which is limited. By casting off the cultural signs of eroticism (the jewels, the shoes), AJ seems to be renouncing the artificial for the "natural"; but this is a characteristic move of the dominant ideology, or ideology in general. What is in fact cultural is posed as natural, especially in terms of the down side of a power relationship: women, children, Blacks, etc. are seen as "natural" because they are without power. Sternberg actually cannot present something which is pure and natural as the binary opposition of the artificial, but just ends up with a confused inversion. In other words, Sternberg presents everything within the framework of the artificial and cultural; he then seems to produce a renunciation of that in the pursuit of a pure desire (natural), but cannot really do so.]

21. Brown as mirage. Two times he leaves, but leaves a trace, which motivates AJ to pursue him: the message on the mirror, her name on the table; and finally he leaves for the desert.



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18/12/2004 10:23:00

- ← A note on teaching with the Brakhage DVD
- ←
  - ← This past fall quarter I assigned the BY BRAKHAGE DVD as a required text in my intro survey experimental film course at Northwestern, which enrolled 33 students. (The other required texts were Sitney, Visionary Film, 3rd ed, and A. L. Rees; grad students did additional reading of David James Allegories of Cinema, and a book of their choice from a suggested list).
  - ←
    - ← I was eager to see if actually being able to do a close study of extremely complex experimental films using the DVD would improve the students' abilities to analyze these films. As many teacher's know, experimental film courses must often be taught so that students get to see films only once, and this severely limits how much they may retain of the experience. Even in situations where I am able to screen a film, have a discussion, and then screen it again, if renting it, I am not able to show it again later in the course, unless my department owns a print, and we have very few experimental films in our collection.
    - ←
      - ← The first day, the first film I screened (as usual) was Mothlight. The second class meeting I screened Window Water Baby Moving twice. When a film I had planned for the midterm was suddenly unavailable, I substituted Thigh Line Lyre Triangular from the DVD (Students had a choice of writing on it, or another short lyrical film; each film was shown twice).
      - ←
        - ← Later in the quarter, I screened
        - ← Brakhage, *Sirius Remembered* (on video) and as films *Arabic 6*, and *The Lion and the Zebra Make God's Jewels*, and *Murder Psalm*
    - ←
      - ← In addition to the parts in Sitney and Rees on Brakhage, the students had Fred Camper's notes for the DVD, and I also had them read two essays on Brakhage by Paul Arthur (the links are at Camper's website), the chapter "The Untutored Eye" from William Wees, Light Moving in Time, and Marjorie Keller's essay in Film Quarterly on Murder Psalm. I also gave them a short essay by me introducing Brakhage.

← Near the end of the course, all the students had to write a report of 500-750 words on one of the films on the DVD, and post it on the Blackboard site for the course (an online teaching resource accessible only to class members) , so they all shared this exercise.

←

← Students had a take-home final with two parts. The first part required:

←

← =====

← Choose one question from Group A and write a concise essay of 1000-1200 words. It is important to think about the question in advance and draw on course screenings, readings, lectures and discussions and come up with a synthesis.

←

## ← **GROUP A**

←

← 1. Present your analysis of *Dog Star Man*. You should draw on your knowledge of Brakhage and the critical discussion of his work, in particular Sitney's presentation of the film and the maker.

←

← 2. How can we understand, experience, and appreciate Brakhage's abstract works? Work from a close analysis of one film on the DVD to discuss the aesthetics of non-figurative moving image materials.

←

← 3. Light, one of the materials and foundations of film art, is not just a subordinate feature for Brakhage but a central issue fusing form and content, style and theme, vision and the materiality of recording and projecting film. Discuss with relation to one or two specific films on the DVD.

←

← 4. Keller's essay on *Murder Psalm* explicitly defends Brakhage from charges that his work is not politically/socially relevant. Discuss how she makes her case and compare or contrast it with a different film on the DVD.

←

← =====

←

← I was very impressed with the overall quality of the students' answers to this part of the exam. Most of them chose to write on "light" and few chose Dog Star Man or the question of abstraction. (But these are film students for the most part, familiar with writing on figurative and representational work, rather than art history or art theory students, say, who might have experienced writing about abstract art.) Certainly the opportunity to view and re-view, examine individual frames and observe editing in detail made a big difference.

←

← In the course evaluations, the students did not remark on gaining a new level of skill in close analysis of experimental work, but I observed it. A few students did remark that they didn't like Brakhage's work. I'd certainly assign the DVD again, but I'd also hope that more DVDs of experimental work are produced with this level of quality, so I'd have other choices for this and other courses.

←

← CHUCK KLEINHANS

Teaching sexual images

Some pragmatics

by Chuck Kleinhans

I've been teaching films and videos with sexual content at Northwestern University's Radio/ Television/ Film Department for about twenty years. I started with taboo-breaking films in an experimental film course, but later I developed a graduate level course on sexual representation. This elective class enrolls about fifteen grad students, mostly from RTF but also some from Performance Studies, Theatre, and sometimes Sociology, and it usually enrolls a few seniors as well. Most of the students have seen at least a little moving image hardcore pornography, although some—often female foreign students—have not. It covers basic issues in representing sexuality and gender with examples from advertising, commercial film and broadcasting, phone sex, popular music including music videos, the avant-garde, AIDS education, commercial pornography, and material developed within and circulated to stigmatized sexual subcultures.

It's important to study pornography in the context of the whole spectrum of sexual representation in our culture, so it can be seen as part of a continuum rather than a special ghettoized form. The topics covered include theoretical and historical analyses of sexuality and the body, recent efforts at censorship and control, the "sex wars" debate within feminism, sex education (especially AIDS media), racial images, and pornography as a genre.<sup>[1]</sup> Since most of the students who take the course are RTF majors, students can complete the course with a written paper or creative work. Some of the films/tapes done for the course have gone on to get festival attention and/or been part of MFA portfolios.

The most important thing in teaching that involves highly charged issues such as pornography is to create a classroom atmosphere that promotes mutual learning. I value class discussions in which students can approach differences they may have with trust, tolerance, and respect for each other. I want students to respect diversity. For example, I want to present both sides of the feminist debate on pornography so students can make up their own minds about it. At the same time, I acknowledge at the start that I've written on the subject and taken a clear position opposed to the feminist anti-porn argument. So I can't pretend I'm neutral, but in the classroom I can try to create space for discussion that allows frank expression of differences on all sides.<sup>[2]</sup>

One basic rule for the class is that no visitors are allowed. As the course goes on and they've talked about what they've experienced with others, students often want to bring roommates, friends, and lovers to class to see certain films/ videos. However, the presence of a new person changes the group dynamics and inhibits the trust that has been built up in the group. I also advise students at the start that I think they should exercise discretion in attributing personal facts or opinions to a specific classmate when conveying information from our discussions outside the class. I explain that people may say things in the process of discussion that they don't want broadcast around campus and that in discussing issues outside of class with others, it's seldom necessary to identify the speaker. However, I do encourage students to talk about the class with others outside of the class: it helps them get more information, more points of view.

One effective early assignment for the course is to write a report after investigating where one can find sexual images and other material on and off campus and what kind it is. This gives them a freedom to explore which can be helpful for learning; since the reports are shared, it also provides a reference point for later discussion. For example, there isn't any child pornography readily available, despite claims by some anti-porn forces that it is a widespread menace.

I always start the course by providing useful superego justifications for the course. (Telling young people in a still-Puritan culture that they can and should think about sex all the time in order to do well in class accelerates learning.) Having a socially acceptable reason for studying sexual images probably helps some students in processing some material. And it helps them explain the course to others, since to say you're taking (or teaching) a course that shows pornography often brings out (defensive) comic, sniggering, or negative reactions from others. I explain that presenting sexual images is a basic professional issue in media making, and that in working situations professionals often have to make decisions about what to show, how much to show, or whom to address in dealing with sex. I also explain that sexual imagery is a public policy issue in terms of internal and external regulation. And I add that social-political movements have raised controversy around these matters. In addition, the tradition of taboo breaking in the avant-garde is historically important in defining and understanding such work.

I always explain in advance the kind of work that will be screened. I give a short description on the syllabus; I end most classes making a connection to what will be seen in the next class to remind students of what's coming up; and I often make some prefatory remarks to introduce a film or

tape. When I first started teaching the course, I didn't do this, thinking that it was important for all the students to see all the different material I was screening.

Gradually I came to understand that through the readings the students do have an introduction to everything in the course, and actually viewing an example of every type and every behavior is not as important. People often need time to digest the new information they're getting in the course, especially about the range of human sexual activities. I respect the student's right to self-selection and volunteering out. Every course self-selects to some extent. The U.S. university's cafeteria style of course selection provides lots of choices. I'm always somewhat surprised that some students whom I think would register for the course choose not to do so, and others I've considered unlikely to take the class end up registering.

I always announce in the first few classes that it is OK for any student to leave during anything I'm screening. (This also makes it easier for people to sit where they can leave easily if they think they might.) But I ask them to stay in the hall and come back in for the discussion. I also say that I don't think anyone in the class should draw any conclusions from such a classmate's choice. I explain that I've found that dining such a course, people sometimes discover things about themselves or remember things about their own history that are triggered by some of the sounds and images screened.

Image material can cause visceral reactions; pornography is a "body genre"--one that is supposed to evoke a direct physical response. I often explain that I usually cry during the sad scenes in melodramas, and that the most disturbing image materials I ever saw were documentary films used at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, which showed concentration camp atrocities. Once when teaching a documentary film with a birth scene, I had a student literally fall out of his chair, and in an experimental film class another student passed out during a birth film. Films do have the power to upset our emotions and provoke our bodies. When a student or students choose to exit, it serves an important educative function to remind everyone of the power of the images they're viewing and of differences within the group.

Faculty often don't notice when, subtly, they use their own experiences and preferences to manipulate students into accepting cultural objects or practices. In fact, this often broadens the student's outlook and secularizes their understanding of the world. Hearing a professor talk casually about going to the opera, a jazz club, or a poetry reading is an eye opening experience for students whose families or home towns never provided them with such

horizons, and the professor's casual reference helps them think they might try it.

I know some people might see letting students choose to leave as making too much of it, acting too protective, not treating students as adults. But my experience is that students often have a tendency to act more sophisticated than they are, especially in a peer group, which is for most of them also an actual or potential dating pool. Group pressure to be hip can also coerce students to be silent, especially those who are uneasy about the practice or ethics of something screened. For me, that's precisely when a discussion should take place. I sometimes have to play devil's advocate to ensure that a fuller discussion is brought out.

Part way through the course, I sometimes solicit anonymous written responses from students on questions they have or topics they would like to have discussed. Related to this is my concern not to dismiss any questions or not listen to any reservations that students may have. Gay male sex is often a starting point for this. Rapidly discussion can become tense when one student makes uninformed statements or uses stereotyped assumptions while other students are openly part of that sexual subculture. In the class, we are, after all, dealing with stigmatized sexual activities. At the same time, talking about safe sex practices, and explicitly noting when unsafe sex is depicted is a good starting point for some discussions. My course readings include safe sex guidelines and I have a detailed set of such guidelines on my office door.

I tend to use clips from films, especially when dealing with commercial pornography, because I think they usually offer the core material for the discussion at hand. Given the episodic construction of most porn features, and the other characteristics of the genre, narrative and character development are seldom important and often nonexistent. Also, using clips allows for a greater variety in terms of presenting examples from different periods, subcultures, etc. However, I do ask the students to view on their own two heterosexual hardcore features (preferably one shot on film, one shot on video since I lecture on the change from film to video production/ aesthetics/ distribution) and one gay male film of their choice from a video rental stores. I feel that they can then screen the tapes with whatever degree of privacy they need to be comfortable. Basically I want them to get a sense of what goes on in such a film, and given that they are all film students, they can pick up on how the piece is shot and edited, the style of acting, the conventions, etc. very quickly. It's clear that some students (male and female, straight and gay) are fascinated with the porn genre, and others take the assignment as a distasteful or boring necessity. I've had some students

simply view the films on fast forward, which denaturalized the viewing enough for them to not be swept up by the raw content.

Although I expect most students to rent their own hardcore tapes, I also provide some on a personal hand-out basis.[3] Part of this is very pragmatic: suburban Evanston where Northwestern is located has video stores which carry heterosexual but not gay porn, so I have some gay porn tapes available so there can be no excuses about availability. Also, it is often more and more difficult to find the titles mentioned in the readings for the course. For example, Linda Williams' book *Hardcore* provides detailed discussion of many shot-on-film titles from the 1970s which are seldom carried in current rental, and few stores carry the Femme or Blush titles. An additional consideration is that for some students, particularly unmarried women from very conservative cultures abroad, it is unthinkable to go and rent hardcore pornography, whereas an appropriate authority figure (the prof) can make the assignment and hand out a tape.

Because *Hardcore* is such an excellent analysis, I've heard of professors who taught it in a film course not specifically on pornography or in a women's studies class, but who were themselves too uneasy with pornography to actually show some and lead a discussion of it in relation to the book. That strikes me as somewhat intellectually irresponsible: as if reading about image material was sufficient to understand it, without actually seeing any images. However, I understand the problem of just parachuting pornography into the middle of a course without context and preparation. In my sexual representation course we are halfway through a ten-week quarter before we get to commercial hardcore pornography and reading Williams' book.

The actual screening of material in class often involves providing additional superego justifications. One of these is medical. The first explicit genital sexual film I show is usually Laird Sutton's *TOUCHING*.[4] I explain this is an educational film for health care and social work professionals which shows lovemaking by an able woman and a man with a lower spinal cord injury which limits his mobility and genital sensation. I further explain that education for the helping professions has to familiarize people with activities their clients may be involved with. The filmmaker was one of the first to make films for this specific market (Previously medical school education about sex often included illustration by showing stag films; you can imagine what kind of misinformation they conveyed, particularly about women's sexuality).

The film is partially distanced because the couple look like hippies, and the room they use is filled with paisley

pillows and other decorations from the 60s counterculture. It is clear that the couple knows each other's bodies very well and what pleasures the other. There is much oral sex, including the woman stimulating the man's rectum. Students typically find this piece so "romantic," and "natural" that I have to point out that they've just witnessed rimming, which I presume most have not participated in, and the film hasn't elicited the negative reactions that often are linked to gay male anal sex. So this piece also sets up a later presentation of gay male sex as not so different after all.

Another superego justification is the course's presenting experimental films with sexual content as examples of art. Since some of these works have been validated by critics, scholars, museums, and so forth as art, students tend to approach them differently than they do commercial pornography, at least initially. (Questioning the high art/low art dichotomy--erotica vs. pornography--is part of my goal in the course.) Another superego justification for students is explaining certain images and activities as examples of minority subcultural expression. Most recently I've done this with a section on leather culture, which segues into presentations on sadomasochism (SM). It's also important, however, to make students sensitive to differences within identify groups. Given the prevailing silence about sexuality and the stigmatization of large parts of it, students need to be aware that not all representations, even when they emerge from a subculture, are accurate about all members of a group. Thus the "girl/girl" scenes in mainstream bet porn can be easily shown as essentially male fantasy material.[5] But it's also necessary to point out that the "back to nature" romanticism of lesbian feminist filmmaker Barbara Hammer's DYKETACTICS or WOMEN I LOVE is not something that all lesbians easily or positively relate to. Nor is the "strap on a dildo" mode of some of the Blush lesbian-made porn.

Over the years the things that I've screened that have made students uncomfortable (at least to the point of wanting to talk about it) have been images in STIGMATA, a tape on piercing, tattooing, and cuts, particularly close-up shots of how the genital and nipple piercings are done. And a scene from CANDYSTRIPERS of a fist and most of an arm inserted in a woman's vagina. The biggest controversy I ever had was after screening an AIDS education tape about negotiating safe sex. One section showed a het couple passionately making out, but when they realized they didn't have condoms, the guy just left. The implication that penis/vagina penetration was necessary to complete intercourse and thereby have pleasurable sex was fiercely challenged by some students who argued for a wide and safe variety of other ways of achieving orgasm for both

partners. This incident also emphasized how slowly the social codes around sexual activity change.

To some extent in teaching I benefit from the privilege that accrues to a tenured, married, heterosexual, middle aged white male. The last time I taught the course I had the opportunity to have some graduate students who were working on their dissertations present some of their research in the class. Ilene Goldman discussed Helmut Newton's photography of women based on interviews she had done with him. Audrey Colby discussed her participant-observation study of a women's "Sluts and Goddesses" workshop run by pornographer and performance artist Annie Sprinkle, Anna McCarthy presented her article on phone sex, and Terri Kapsalis elaborated her article on gynecological images. Also, my RTF department colleague, Laura Kipnis, discussed her videotape on the capitalist commodification of sexuality, ECSTASY UNLIMITED (which was screened), and her essays on *Hustler* magazine, she/male images and fat pornography.[7]

My course has changed over time. In the early 80s it seemed important to spend a lot of time on the debates within feminism on pornography. At the end of the decade, the question of censorship, especially around the Mapplethorpe controversy seemed more important. In the early 90s, feminist-produced pornography was a hot topic. Currently, I want to cover the debate about sex on the Internet.

I've never been satisfied with how I've taught issues of race and sex in this course. In pornography the obvious topics are clear: showing racist stereotypes such as the rape sequence in BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR; presenting yet another example of sex tourism in the current crop of "gonzo documentaries" (such as the BUTTMAN IN BRAZIL series); demonstrating erasure, such as the non-appearance of Asian men in het porn.

However, I've yet to find very plausible discussions of sexual desire that crosses race boundaries in terms of both representation and identification.[8] For example, if we say the obvious, that black and asian women are exotic Others for the straight white male gaze, we still haven't accounted for such identification in watching a black male actor engaged with a black or white woman. Or straight black male viewing or women's spectatorship of the same scene. The race and gender issues of such pornographic spectatorship are at once the most obvious and the most studiously avoided questions in recent film theory's engagement with "subject positioning" and spectatorship.

The emphasis on topics changes, but the fundamental need to develop an adequate analysis of the power of sexual images remains an important reason for offering the class.

## NOTES

1. For a detailed description of a somewhat similar course, see Chris Straayer, "Sexual Representation in Film and Video," *Multiple Voices in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice Welsh (Minneapolis: U of Minn. Press, 1994), 503-512.
2. Actually a consistent criticism I've received in student course evalautions is that I give too much attention to the feminist anti-porn position, given that many students find the Dworkin-MacKinnon writings long on rhetoric, short on thought, and too repetitive.
3. I provide students with some suggestions for titles. For example, DEBBIE DOES DALLAS or DEBBIE DUZ DISHES (aka BLAZING MATTRESSES no. 1) are comedies which new viewers may find more acceptable than the abduction/ rape story at the heart of BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR, which also contains a particularly racist stereotype of an African American man who rapes the white heroine. (I do sometimes show a clip from this scene to demonstrate extreme racism in some examples of the genre.) Similarly with gay porn: outsiders usually find romantic films such as BOYS IN THE SAND, which features hunky couples, easier to take than the anonymous orgy sleaze of L.A. TOOL AND DIE. (A clip from the latter is good for explicating sleaze as an important erotic/ aesthetic category in considering porn.)

A good mail order source for a somewhat select range of tapes is the feminist sex toy store Good Vibrations (catalogue \$4.00), 1210 Valencia, San Francisco CA 94110.

4. 1972, 17 mm. film. Multi-Media Resource Center, San Francisco.

5. Which doesn't mean that they are not a turn on for some heterosexual women and some lesbians.

6. Anna McCarthy, "Reach Out and Touch Someone: Technology and Sexuality in Broadcast Ads for Phone Sex," *Velvet Light Trap* no. 32, Fall 1993; Terri Kapsalis, "Public 'Privates' and the Gynecological Image," *Public* no. 8, 1993, pp. 184-203.

7. Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*," in Kipnis, *Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender, and Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: U of Minn. Press, 1993), 219-241. "She-Male Fantasies and the Aesthetics of Pornography," in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 124-143. "Life in the Fat Lane," in Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged*:

*Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove, 1996), pp 93-121. The video ECSTASY UNLIMITED (60 mm.) is distributed by the Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

8. As usual, the most interesting pertinent discussions have come from queer and feminist theorists, such as: Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Male Porn," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Christopher Ortiz, "Hot and Spicy: Representation of Chicano/Latino Men in Gay Pornography," *Jump Cut* no. 39 (June 1994) 83-90; B. Ruby Rich, "When Difference Is (More Than) Skin Deep," in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (NY: Routledge, 1993); Jane Gaines, "Competing Glances: Who Is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book?*" *New Formations* no. 16 (Spring 1992): 24-39; and Gaines, "Feminist Heterosexuality and Its Politically Incorrect Pleasures," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Winter 1995), 382-410.

This is just a preliminary set of ideas and thought provoking questions that are present in Bourdieu's article. A comprehensive handout will be passed out in class.

Bourdieu asserts a series of real, social relationships, all driven by class cleavages and learned values arising in their adherence. He makes the following claim: "Tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference" (205). And these differences are framed entirely in the negation or refutation of other tastes and tastes of others. As such, the individual is framed as both individual and adherent to a larger set of manifested preferences.

Given this general assertion:

1. When is individuality performed?
2. Does the class define itself only in overt consumption? What about hybridity of preferences, or labor engendered biases?
3. How does the performance of rank change with current technological waves?

These are just a few thoughts to consider as we move to Monday's presentation.

## Theory class -- rules of thumb

it is very important for the students to read as many primary essays as possible rather than summaries, commentaries, synthesis, excerpts, etc. They will be reading that other stuff anyway on their own.

They should be required to very carefully and precisely write a fair and accurate short summary of several major articles, and share them with the other students: eg. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. From this they learn (from having to read it slowly and carefully several times) how different theoretical essays are actually rhetorically and logically constructed, support their arguments with reasons and example, etc.

I have usually started the class with Benjamin's Work of Art essay and gone through the entire argument step by step so they see just how rich and complex such a piece can be. That provides a model of what I then expect them to do when they read a theoretical essay.

All of them should have to do one complete textual analysis breakdown of a scene: that is shot by shot close analysis that accounts for all elements of editing, mise en scène, sound and music track etc. They need to understand the problems and danger of making hasty and careless assumptions based on casual or unworked out viewing.

(professionally fatal) Probably the best guide to this is Bordwell's book on analysis of the narrative film (which they don't have to master at this point, but should by the time of their quals)

In other words, theory should help us actually understand concrete examples, not just put forward vague and (unprovable) assertions

Students often pick up some dumb attitudes or half-thoughts from their peers or the passing remark of someone who seems authoritative or having been powerfully enlightened by some essay or chapter or book just assume this is the total answer. Along the way they lose the need for constant self scrutiny of basic assumptions, an understanding that theorists actually evolve over time (and often have rather long careers), etc. (e.g., Judith Butler has, over time, changed or clarified some of her basic views in response to very smart criticisms by other critics—to her credit) However, you will still see young writers quoting something or other from early Butler as if it were locked in stone truth or dogma.. It is damn hard to be subtle and nuanced in using theory, but it is necessary to get respect in the field.

Film theory actually evolves, over time. Old questions are not usually lost forever but reappear in different ways as the actual media field changes. Some questions are perennial: realism.

I sometimes remark to students (so they don't become too much little smarty pants "theorists" and try to lord it over others) that media theory is a desperate attempt to catch

up with the evolving and expanding complexity of media practice. It sometimes gets close, but it never overtakes the object of study.

A good theory must be complete (account for all the actual things it is trying to generalize about; you can't have left overs or odd exceptions, etc.) and it must be elegant (not have to endlessly construct new subsets to account for this or that or contradictions or exceptions.)

## Unities

In growing old, one grows more foolish and wise--Chinese fortune cookie proverb

The histories of avant garde film and video have been written separately, as if the work produced in each tradition was completely autonomous. This is true of both the formal histories written in critical books and articles on the media avant garde, and in the informal, word of mouth histories that circulate in legendary fashion between teachers and students, masters and apprentices, exhibitors and publicists. These separate histories are also partially articulated in institution discourses such as distribution catalogues, festival and other exhibition practices, educational structures, and in the adjoining areas of commercial and nonprofit small scale media production.

I want to question this separation--its causes, its history, and its pragmatic implications for the present and the future of independent experimental media, but most of all I want to challenge the theoretical-critical basis for the distinction between film and video art.

Now I'm not saying that there is no ontological difference between film and video. There is, even if developments such as High Definition Television and the current normative process of mixing film and video in various postproduction practices seem to challenge some of the formerly most frequently invoked differences. Film involves projected images ready reflected light and video exists as a glowing screen, except, of course, when we view video as a projected beam and when we see experimental films broadcast on PBS or cablecast on Arts & Entertainment or Bravo. Well, hmm.. let me back up a little and start again. Film involves theatrical presentation while video--whoops!...Well, there really is a difference, isn't there? Don't we all really know it?

Ok, ok, I'm setting things up to make a point: experimental film and video artists often assert the difference between the two media as inherent, as ontological, when in fact they are for most part conventional, institutional, and definitely gradually disappearing. But that doesn't deal with the emotional, the embodied, the felt difference that experimental makers and critics, historians and enthusiasts experience and recall when thinking about this issue. And these emotions can be powerful as witnessed in the now long standing controversy in Canyon Cinema about admitting videos to the distribution co-op.

The controversy is instinctively typical. What started innocently enough as Canyon selling a few videos of films made by members of the experimental film distribution coop because a huge controversy when some film purists in the group claimed that videos were illegitimate in a film coop and worst of all--would take over and push out film. Great flaming paranoia

We might laugh, but the personal emotional investment is immense  
(own story?)

The divergent histories of film and video art in the U>S> explains some of the differences. Experimental film has a long history, with notable examples from every

decade since the 1920s whereas experiential video, as legend has it, started in the mid-60s with Nam June Paik's first portapak. By that time experimental film had achieved quantitative and qualitative power. The New American Cinema was recognized in the artworld and ==through scandal--ion the popular press with taboo breaking films gaining attention, if not acclaim. It's enough to mention Warhol to make the point.

Experiential film fgained a youth based audience as well as bohemian endorsement, as J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum detail in their book on the phenomenon, *Midnight Movies*. Festivals were established, new screening venues created, the media arts category was establsihed llll through foundation and NEA support, distribution coops were establsihed, some commercial distributors (such as Audio Brandon) began to pay attention and distribute some films while smaller distributors staked out a claim (Grove Press, *Serious Business Company*).<sup>1</sup> The 60's counterculture endoresed film experientation and avant garde film mkaers , for the most part, were part of the counter culture. The boom in College and university film studies and filmmaking programs began in earnest and were sustained so that by the 1970s some experiental filmmakers were being hired as college teachers, giving them a stable base and the opportunity to establish their version of historuy and the nature of the field.

Video art remained in its earlyi stages of f development, sometimes linked to activist documetnaries (such as TTVT's reports on political conventions and the Guru ---- phenomenon, and in the art world performance art (Paik-Moorman, Joan Jonas, etc. \_ and sculpture (kespecially with installation) more than independent film. IWe need to remember that at this time in the 60's and 70s 16mm film maintained a very powerful industrial support syystem because it was the standard for TV newsgathering and the industrial/educational market. Because of this, 16mm filmmakers had an unrecognized "free ride" in that the material infrastructure of production was large enought to create substantial margins and it was on that periphery that an experiential film cujlture could be sustained. And at some moments, the industrial sector could even provide emplyiment (Brakhage before Water Window Baby Moving, others...).

Video faced a very diffrent situaiton. Thw world of U.S> broadcast television had no margins<sup>1</sup>. Portapak video vwas rigidly excluded from tv and from academic film studies. Diffusion was complicated. Videos could be bicycled around and easily duplicated--to other people who had portapaks--but the film dominated or broadcast dominated the environment. Instiutions wanted no part of it. For this reason the artistic expression of video is sometimes traced back to broadcast studio innovators such as comedian Ernie Kovacs.

Another important and frequently unnoticed phenomenon emerges here: the world of independent film was overwhelmingly the world of white guys (straight and gay). The Founding meeting of the New American cinema had only one woman (Shirley Clarke) and one African American (Edward Bland). The pattern remained in place. But video took off in a different direction with Korean American Paik involved from the start. Women videomakers were common throughout the 1970's as the field grew, and as original makers, not just girlfriends. Since experimental film first acquired prestige within the academy and art school, video was left as an underdeveloped area. But interestingly enough, as such it was much more open to women and minorities. And it

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<sup>1</sup>Saturday Night Live in its early years in the mid Seventies showd some short comic films, but never tapes)

could be learned and practiced thrifitly in public access television. We see the results today in cmparing the catalogues of the video Danta BAnk or Electronic Art Intermix with those of Canyon Cinema or the New York Filmmaker's Coop.

## Washington Women: Joan Allen in the White House

Thanks, hist moment

Thank you for the introduction. I want to thank Joe Heuman and Robin Murray for the invitation, and everyone working on the Embarras [Ahm-brah] Valley Film Festival for their help, especially Dennis Malak for technical support. This is an impressive event, and I'm glad I can be here.

When I was first asked about making a presentation, I was glad to suggest something on representing national politics in the cinema, since the talk would follow on the national election campaign. I couldn't know then what would transpire—and just how remarkable this election season would be. With Hillary Clinton as a leading candidate in the primaries, and then the surprise addition of Sarah Palin to the Republican ticket, we've had an interesting chance to see how gender plays out in the national election arena, and the films I'm going to talk about relate to gender issues in an illuminating way. Also, since the election has been so close, it was challenging to write up this talk while realizing I wouldn't know the outcome until election night, --or if history repeated itself—perhaps not for weeks afterwards if the ballots in key states were contested.

I want to move through three different phases of this talk, moving from broad and general to much more specific. First I want to briefly discuss the way Hollywood has presented Washington and national politicians. Then I want to reflect on how we can represent the political and the personal in cinematic dramatic form. Finally I want to discuss two films, *Nixon* (Oliver Stone, 1995) and *The Contender* (Rob Lurie, 2000) as examples of a commercial entertainment cinema that takes on political issues in terms of matters of state and the behavior of politicians. I want to discuss Joan Allen's performance of two characters, Pat Nixon and the fictional Senator Laine Hansen, in terms of their position as the moral center of the dramas.

### ONE

In the first country to elect a movie star President, Hollywood's representations of politicians range from reverence to ridicule--just like American public opinion about its political leaders. I'd like to remind you of that range, because I think it's useful for imagining the terrain that could be present. [and you might want to take notes on any titles you'd like to rent at the video store or check out at the library]

One model is the **heroic archetype** and we can think here of Henry Fonda in **Young Mr. Lincoln** (John Ford, 1939). In an amusing and instructive early sequence, the young lawyer rides into Springfield on a donkey, and then, as the most eligible young bachelor present, is asked to judge the pies at a fair. The comic moment has Lincoln tasting first the apple pie and then the peach and then saying he can't decide and eating even more and more. In a warm hearted way, the scene depicts Lincoln as both a hungry young man, and also as a very clever

Great Reconciler who is able--in this small moment—to reveal his talent for resolving conflict. Which, of course, is his historical destiny.

Another model is the **sentimental populism** of Frank Capra's **Mr. Smith Goes to Washington** (Frank Capra, 1939). Remember the dramatic scene at the end with Jimmy Stewart's final emotional-heroic speech in the Congress (and the fine villain, Claude Rains, present). Here heartfelt passion for simple justice confronts the corruption of politics-as-usual with the final triumph of good.

Both of these films are examples of films that are both commercially and popularly successful in their time and which contribute to the popular imagination of American national politics. They interweave a dramatic personal story with a historic or public moment in national life, and they make us think that individuals can change history by their character, their actions, and their noble sentiments.

There is a large group of films about national level politics that I would call "**liberal films**"—liberal in the sense that they basically affirm the value system and practice of US government institutions as able to deal with challenges and confrontations, to be healthy enough to change and evolve, rather than what I could call a "conservative" trend to simply appeal to tradition and return to a previous imagined order. (Conservative films in this sense tend to deal more with military events than governmental ones, and the heroism of leaders aims to restore a previous order.)

These liberal films often show the inner workings of the state at crisis moments which allow leaders to come forward to the challenges. I'm thinking here of films such as **Advise and Consent** (d. Otto Preminger, 1962), **The Best Man** (d. Franklin J. Schaeffer, w. Gore Vidal, 1964), or liberal thriller films such as **Seven Days in May** (d. John Frankenheimer, 1964)--coup anyone? We could add to this **All the President's Men** (d. ) about reporters uncovering the Watergate cover-up.

A twist on the liberal formula is the **liberal paranoia** film such as **The Manchurian Candidate**—or **The Parallax View**—or **JFK**—Oliver Stone's paranoia. These films are usually quite pessimistic about the possibility of meaningful change.

An important and appealing subgenre is the **Liberal satire film** which exposes the flaws and distortions in the system and American society with an eye to calling for reform to strengthen the system. Probably the finest example is **The Candidate**--Robert Redford sells out.

Others in this vein would include:  
The Seduction of Joe Tynan  
Bob Roberts--selling fascist populism  
Wag the Dog--the ultimate October surprise  
Primary Colors—(d. Mike Nichols, 1998)

Bulworth--Warren Beatty takes on the hypocrites  
Also Shampoo (a reflection on the 1968 election of Nixon)

Given that an ongoing strength of US democracy is that it is possible to openly criticize our rulers (something we should not take for granted, for in much of the world this is simply not an option), the satiric or comic mode can be used for a robust critique of the existing order.

But even more compelling to me is a strain of extreme satire which I will call **Absurdist**. The finest example here would have to be the cold war comedy **Dr. Strangelove** (Stanley Kubrick, 1964). But this subgenre has also produced some witty films worth tracking down: *The President's Analyst* (Theodore J. Flicker, 1967) and the youth culture fantasy of *Wild in the Streets* (Barry Shear, 1968) *Congress lowers the voting age*.

A more recent trend is to place the President in a **High Concept action film**: Here the supreme example could be **Independence Day** (Roland Emmerich, 1996) in which the President (a former military pilot) played by Bill Pullman escapes the White House just in time when aliens attack the world, and finally leads the attack on the enemy invaders. This film moves to the conservative / military message I mentioned earlier in which bold leadership directly confronts global menace, but a close second would have to be *Air Force One* –in which Harrison Ford as President, fights terrorists with his bare hands, finally throwing them off “his plane.”

Two final films: **Low Concept**: the President loses the day  
*Mars Attacks!* (Tim Burton, 1996)  
Jack Nicholson has a rude awakening  
And . **Romantic naiveté**  
*Dave* (Ivan Reitman, 1993) Kevin Klein stands in for the Comotose President

**Personal life and personality**  
NIXON as (oedipal) tragedy

## TWO: PRIVATE AND / VS PUBLIC

There is a long-standing melodramatic interest in the contrast between public lives and images of the powerful and their private lives. We are familiar with this from the longstanding “boardroom and bedroom” novels and films and TV shows that show the “behind the scenes” of the powerful and often glamourous. In the past this was most commonly fictional, but with a newer trend in popular history writing, we began to have reports of the private lives of Franklin D Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy (*Happy Birthday Mr. President*), and this has even evolved into a new kind of looking back at US history as in the *John Adams* TV series.

But, of course, this trend is complicated by two things. One is the massive expansion of celebrity culture, so that there seems to be virtually nothing that we

can't or don't know about public figures and their private lives—I need only mention Paris Hilton or Britney Spears—since we not only know their private lives, but can also see images of their private parts online.

Second is the dramatization of the “inside story” as seen in the TV series *The West Wing* which purported to show how the corridors of power actually operate with personal lives intersecting with professional lives and rivalries, and matters of public policy and pragmatic politics. I can't elaborate here on the show, or its pale derivative, *Commander in Chief*, but I would argue that this weekly prime time view of inside the White House was not only “liberal” in intent and effect (a widely held idea on both the left and the right) but also helped create the public's imagination of how the personal and political intersect and interact.

There is an undeniable pleasure in thinking we know the inside story, the hidden truth, the “real version” of what is going on. And that is part of our current political environment. We saw in the just concluded political campaign season, how this plays out, and significantly, how it has been charged by gender politics. The candidacy of Hillary Clinton, in particular, raised these issues in multiple ways: by her own history and the past rumors and charges that she was involved in shady financial deals before her husband's election, by further charges that she was involved in misappropriation of funds and possibly the death of a White House aide, her relation with her philandering husband, and so on. Had she been nominated by the Democrats, doubtless these matters would have been brought up again. And in addition, we might have seen the tabloid rumors revived that she was “a lesbian,” because she spent private social time with women. What we have consistently seen is the obnoxious attacks on her in public at campaign appearances such as the “iron my shirts” cries, or the Rush Limbaugh ridicule of her pants suits (because she didn't have the attractive legs of Sarah Palin), and so forth.

We shouldn't forget this gender-charged conflict. So let me remind you that Barack Obama and (to a lesser degree) John McCain showed significant restraint in holding back those of their supporters who wanted to attack the opponent through discussing their family life or personal life. Not that this material didn't come out, because it did on various blogs and in the tabloids, but it was clearly muffled for the most part. For Obama, in large part this was because there was apparently no personal or private scandal to reveal. For McCain it seems that the Democrats chose to not to make an issue of his treatment of his first wife, dumping her for Cindy McCain as his trophy wife.

But the initial announcement of Palin's nomination as Vice President did bring forward supposedly scandalous news: The National Enquirer showed precisely this effect with its September 15 issue: “Sarah Palin's Dark Secrets!

- Affair that nearly ruined her career
- How She tried to cover up teen daughter's pregnancy
- Family war that exposed her lies

ASK—DO YOU WANT TO HEAR THE DETAILS? OH, YOU DO? SO, YOU'VE JUST DEMONSTRATED MY THESIS, THAT THE PUBLIC REALLY DOES WANT TO DISH THE DIRT, EVEN THOUGH THIS WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH HER FITNESS FOR OFFICE (AT LEAST ACCORDING TO THE MORAL UNIVERSE IN **THE CONTENDER**)

The affair—she allegedly had an affair with her husband's business partner; when her husband Todd found out, he dissolved his business relationship and friendship with the guy.

The cover up of pregnancy—juggling dates for announcing the fact of the pregnancy, apparently trying to have the pair married before the public announcement, etc.

The next issue: Sept 22 had new revelations:

- Daughter Bristol was a dope smoking underage drinking part girl
- Her son Trig was an OxyContin addict involved in vandalism and theft
- Palin was pregnant when she got married
- Palin sent daughter Bristol to live with Palin's sister, 25 miles away, and forbid the girl from seeing Levi Johnston, and the "official story" at her high school was that Bristol was out of school with mononucleosis.

ENOUGH!

Nixon and The Contender both develop on the central tension between the public and the private side of politician's lives. This fits into a well-established dramatic mode which plays with the public's desire for "the real story." Or the "behind the scenes" view of either or both the lives of important people or the playing out of matters of historical or state importance. It actually wasn't so long ago that this terrain was largely left to the activity of historical biography which "uncovered" the formerly personal and private world of the Great Man or Woman and which usually appeared decades after the person's death. Yet in America, in particular, the rough and tumble of politics has often lead to expose and scandal as a means of gaining advantage over opponents, and the tradition of a free press and sensational journalism generates a counter-weight to the idea of gravitas in the public sphere.

Yet the form of melodrama as a narrative pattern has always pushed toward the collapse of great events and minor circumstances when the historical moment can be combined with

(Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*)

Rather obviously, Oliver Stone examines Nixon, the man, in terms of a deep psychological tension that motivates the private man, the individual, in terms of his public face. Nixon, as portrayed by Anthony Hopkins, is a man constantly tormented not only by feeling flawed, and that others are judging him as inferior and angry as a result. This Nixon sees himself as the victim of other's

judgements—his father, the Eastern and elite political crowd, the (in his view liberal) media. Most importantly, in Stone's moral universe, Nixon enacts a self-pity which propels him to a sour and crazed melodramatic end to his Presidency. (it can't rise to the level of tragedy, for that would have to have a grander horizon, and Nixon is shown to be essentially paltry, in emotion, in imagination, and totally lacking in moral and ethical sense).

### **THREE: The Problem of Representing Power**

One of the enduring reasons we are fascinated with political drama is the problem of representing power. Where is power? What is power? Can we view this abstract concept?

We might remember that in the medieval period, power was thought to be in the person of the ruler, the King. Thus we find chroniclers writing that a particular King moved from one place to another and peace and order came to the new place while disorder erupted in the former location. And in changing times, we see for example in the Renaissance a protracted dramatization of what power means in Shakespeare's history plays. Is it the person? Or what if we have a flawed person, or a person who is influenced by others, or who must mature or change in order to rule effectively? These were real concerns of the public at the time, and Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists were trying to explore those issues in a dramatic form. But from this time on, it is understood that power unbalanced can change, hurt, and destroy. It can become tyrannical. Thus in dramatic terms, power comes to be most typically balanced against morality (which can be embodied in tradition or stability) and which can be asserted as a counterweight to power-out-of control.

But if it is difficult to "see power" precisely because it is an abstraction and we can only see its exercise, its expression in actions, and we also today have a different sense of power.

--we are also concerned with power balanced against morality--

In Oliver Stone's *NIXON* the balance against Richard Nixon is his wife Pat who is the only one who can stand up to him in person, face to face.

Clip for Nixon

Set up: pay attention to the use of shadow and dark space within the frame to create a mood and determine the way we look at the scene. Then pay attention to the importance of the face, the close up in particular. This is one of the key elements of cinematic drama—a privileged way of seeing actors and characters. We "get close" and establish as audience members our own intimate relationship (be that fantasy or idealization, or fear or desire, etc.)—the close up of the face amplifies our emotional/intellectual bond with the character. This also gives us the importance of facial gestures in screen acting (as distinct from stage acting): the raised eyebrow, the tear welling up in the eye, the slight tremble on the lip, etc.

In this scene, set after his defeat in the California Gubernatorial election of 1962, Pat Nixon announces she will divorce Dick Nixon; he says he will end his political career to save the marriage and family. But of course, we know that he will run again in 1968; he won't keep his word—which is his "fatal flaw" in this "tragic" story: he can't be honest. Thus Pat Nixon is the moral center of this drama, the one who holds to what is moral and ethical in the real lived world, and we can judge Richard Nixon by his inability to match that norm.

Chapter 7 From 00:30.27 to 00:37:05 (Six and one/half minutes)  
from (group scene)--announcement that Nixon has lost the election  
to fade to black (new scene that follows is Nixon going to the press conference)

## DISCUSS

### Clips for The Contender

Set up: Three different settings and moods. First, we see Senator Laine Hansen in professional action as an important politician, clearly a leader, discussing with a group who leave as she has a meeting with a member of the committee she is appearing before. Representative Webster (Christian Slater) is shot with an American flag behind him which makes an ironic visual comment. Hansen is mature and in command, and clearly articulates how and why she wants to deal with charges of sexual impropriety in her college days. (A smear has been made that she engaged in sex with multiple members of a fraternity; a photograph seems to document it; several hearsay reports of the event circulate. However we are in narrative suspense about the actual truth of these stories.) The office is filled with sunlight from outside.

Second, She appears on a porch in her home in a meeting with her chief of staff and the wife of the chair of the committee, who reveals personal and private information about her and her husband that would publicly wound and humiliate this aggressive bully. Notice that this scene is in open shade on a sunny day.

Then, third, we return to the ongoing congressional hearing where the questioning by Representative Shelly Runyon (Gary Oldman) becomes even sharper and Hansen must make a decision to use the information she has to retaliate to the harassment, or to remain quiet and accept her own standard that personal and private issues should not be part of this public hearing and her fitness for office. Here in the dark space of the hearing room there is only artificial light and strategically placed TV monitors. The harshness of the interrogation is matched by the move to representing the scene in extreme close-ups of the monitors, making the faces flat, marked by the TV scan lines, and monochromatic, while the sound track changes to the microphones and recording of voice emphasizing the media nature of the event, its mechanical aspect.

From 01:15:25 to 01:21:10 (Five and one/half minutes)  
from meeting of Senator Laine Hansen with Representative Reginald Webster  
to end of scene in the congressional hearing (new scene calls new witness)

## DISCUSS

Again, the face and the closeup is essential to the scene. We can see that the film redramatizes two of the signal events of the previous decade: the hearings on Clarence Thomas's nomination to the Supreme Court and the testimony of Anita Hill about his sexual harassment of her, and how this matter was turned against her. The other event was, of course, the Clinton impeachment hearings which involved detailed reports of the Clinton-Lewinsky encounters as part of highly partisan maneuvers.

In this case the political strategy of trying to gain advantage over an opponent by ringing forward what is normally personal and private and thus humiliating them is emphatically amplified by raising the issue of a double standard for the personal sexual histories of men and women. Joan Allen, as Laine Hansen, is again the moral center, holding to her personal ethical standard in a hostile and increasingly misogynist situation.

There is another key scene, where the President (Jeff Bridges), his Chief of Staff (Sam Elliot) and Laine Hanson discuss what to do at the next hearing. They tell her to "confess" and she refuses to do that, saying she will resign first. A tear wells up and falls in an extreme closeup of her face. At that point the President changes his opinion and says she should stand and fight for her principles and show everyone why he nominated her. She then returns and in the next committee scene declares her key policy stands while continuing to say nothing about her personal life and past.

## Conclusion:

American cinema has a wide variety of strategies for dramatizing American politics ranging from sober examination of moral/ethical issues to wild comedy and action adventure, from sharp satire to sentimental romanticism. And this also represents the variety of American attitudes to politics ranging from "the genius of the American system" to a "necessary evil" that should be checked and reduced as much as possible. We shouldn't forget that this is a function of US democracy as a political idea and as a lived practice. But we can also see that the representation of politics and power in the commercial system of Hollywood films is also bound to the melodramatic presentation of power in its social basis in personal life—behind the scenes is necessary for dramatic interest, but also because deep down we do believe that personal decisions matter. We think this of ourselves when we vote, we think that of our leaders when we examine them (or praise them in election oratory, or mock them on The Daily Show).

Nixon and The Contender fall on the very serious side of representing public life. Oliver Stones Psycho-portrait of a deeply flawed man attempts to understand

Nixon the man, but also the US as a nation and national culture. This is the leader that this country deserved. And *The Contender* brought forward elements of the recent national culture, especially the Clinton impeachment process, ringing a key change by updating it with an analysis of gender politics and asking the audience to themselves question what they think of the double standard and just how much private or personal information the public should have in judging public figures.

The optimism we have today following the presidential election, the hope for change and the general enthusiasm for the dawn of a new day in US politics, was shaped, at least to some degree by both of these films. They helped us imagine a powerful and flawed leader (which continues in Stone's new film on George W Bush), and they helped us think about gender politics in the public sphere.

Thank you.